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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A New Mike Shayne Thriller
TERROR RESORT
by Brett Halliday

A Novelet
THE LEGACY
by Alan Warren

Short
Stories
by the
Best
Suspense
Writers
in the
World!



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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

47744

NOVEMBER 1982



**SPIES AND SABOTEURS
BEWARE!
"BLACKHAWK" STRIKES
EVERYWHERE!**

TOPS in
SERIAL ADVENTURE

TOPS in
SERIAL EXCITEMENT

THE MIRACULOUS
BLACKHAWK
FREEDOM'S CHAMPION

starring

KIRK ALYN

with

CAROL JOHN
FORMAN • CRAWFORD

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and SHERMAN L. LOWE • Based on The Blackhawk Comic Magazine
drawn by Reed Crandall and Charles Carter • Produced by SAM
KATZMAN • Directed by SPENCER BENNETT and FRED F. SEARS

A COLUMBIA SUPER-SERIAL

NOVEMBER 1982
VOLUME 46
NUMBER 11
ISSN 0026-3621

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

EDWARD GOLDSTEIN
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Publishers

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY
MAGAZINE, Vol. 46, No. 11,
November 1982. Published
monthly by Renown Publica-
tions, Inc., 6660 Reseda Blvd.
#108, Reseda, CA 91335.
Subscription, One Year (12
issues) \$18.00; Two Years (24
issues) \$32.00; Canada, One
Year \$21.00; Two Years
\$38.00; Foreign, One Year
\$24.00; Two Years \$40.00
(U.S. Funds Only). Second
Class postage paid at Reseda,
CA and at additional mailing
offices. Events and characters
in this magazine are wholly
fictitious. Copyright © 1982
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tional and Pan-American
Conventions. Printed in the
United States of America.
Postmaster — return P.O.
Box 178, Reseda, CA 91335.

TERROR RESORT

by Brett Halliday

It was a terrible place to visit, and Mike Shayne didn't want to die there. But if certain people had their way, that's exactly what the big redheaded Miami detective would do! 4

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It was an exciting place to visit, but Mike Shayne didn't want to die there!

Terror Resort

by BRETT HALLIDAY

SOMEWHERE IN THE AUSTRALIAN PINES A MOCKING BIRD issued its cry of territorial imperative. The scarecrow-thin figure in the brush below wished he'd heard the advice earlier and stayed away. But it was too late for that now.

The half-moon's rays shot obliquely through the trees, making it easier for him to see where he was going in this alien territory. Unfortunately, it helped the enemy too, not that they needed help. They were professionals. He was an amateur — a meddling amateur who had stuck his nose out too far this time.

Ahead of him the bay water gently lapped the shore. Water would throw off those big black dogs. What did you call them? The name he couldn't remember. But one thing stuck in his mind — those dogs were bred to kill. Frogs practiced their night songs as the palm and pine thinned out. In front of him he spotted some mangroves, and he knew he was on the beach.

He stumbled down the beach, his bare feet managing to find every protruding sandspur. Then he pitched forward, crumbling into the moist sand. A ghost crab stared at him as it scuttled by on all fours. Why couldn't *he* be so dextrous? he thought wryly.

He paused, considering the alternatives. His only chance would be to swim across the bay. In his youth that would have been no trouble;

he could have swum around the world. Now he had trouble making it across the pool at the "Y" — the short way. A log, a piece of driftwood would help keep him afloat — if he could find one. He estimated the distance across the bay between three-fourth to one-half mile. No waves. Damn! He'd be a sitting duck if they saw him.

He moved down the beach, through the vines and occasional palmetto. Any other day he'd have been tripping over enough driftwood to start a tourist trap. Ahead the moon broke through some fallen pines, making what looked like the shadow of the cross on the beach. Salvation. He tried to break the trunks loose. Nothing budged. He continued on.

Behind him infrequent shouts blended in with the creature sere-nade. He didn't bother looking back. They had to be gaining. Why had he been so clumsy back there? He'd been standing on that orange crate peering through a side window when the boards snapped. He had hurried away, hoping they wouldn't notice. But their flashlights must have found his footprints. Then the dogs were let loose.

A gas can gleamed like silver in the moonlight. Maybe some fisherman had knocked it overboard in the bay and it had drifted in. Picking it up, he headed for the water. Entering in quickly, he submerged the can. No bubbles. No sense of it getting heavy. He had a buoy.

In low tide, he might have been able to walk to the mainland. But the luck of the Irish wasn't with him now. Apparently, he'd used his quota just finding this place. He pushed off and began to float. Not as graceful as those surfing kids, but he was moving. Hugging the can like his last bottle of liquor, he began to kick. He imagined a voice telling him to keep his knees straight.

Then he heard real voices, calling out in a mixture of English and Spanish. They had found where he had entered the bay. Flashlights gleamed on the glassy surface of the water, but he was out of their range. Dogs began to whine, disgusted the prey had eluded them. He kicked softly, but steadily. He breathed a sigh of relief. He was going to make it. The old man was going to defeat those kids.

Overhead a small plane without lights coughed its way through the skies. Smugglers, he imagined. Hell, half the people in the state were smuggling dope or refugees in, and the other half were taking plants and tans out. He was starting to feel a little smug when he heard the first rapid report. Off to his left bullets caromed off the water like errant stones. Then the water to his right erupted. He heard little thunks as though the waves were swallowing.

DIRECTLY BEHIND HIM THE WATER EXPLODED. THEY WERE

smart, firing in a pattern, not just random bursts. Standard military procedure. The gun they were using sounded familiar, too. What was that Israeli weapon that had become so popular on the black market? Uzi, that was it.

The next round was closer. At least they weren't using tracers. Any second they were going to zero in on him, and early the next night some fisherman was going to find something larger than shrimp in his nets.

An idea struck him before a bullet. Letting go of the can, treading water, he removed his jacket. With less than a quarter of a mile to go, surely he could make it alone. Gradually he worked his coat off. On the shore a vehicle plowed into the sand. Then a bright light began to sweep the bay. A change in tactics, but it might buy him the time he needed.

When the jacket came off, he tied it around the can, then paddled away. As he headed toward the shore, the can began to drift to the right, bobbing up and down in the water like a giant fishing float.

When less than a hundred yards separated him from the can, it was caught in a light. Seconds later a shot rang out and then another. He heard a ping as the can jerked. He half expected the can to go up in flames, but it only did that in James Bond movies.

Suddenly the light was extinguished and he heard nothing but nature. The water struck him as warm, and the waves seemed to play across his face like a baby's friendly hand. It didn't take him long till he could stand up. Then he found himself trying to run through the waist-deep water.

HE GUESSED IT WAS ABOUT THREE O'CLOCK WHEN HE pulled himself up on the beach. The air felt hot and moist. He took off his trousers, wrung them out, and put them back on. How long would his ruse work? Just before he had crossed the bridge to the island, he had seen a sawdust restaurant and a payphone on the wall just beside the NEHI sign.

He walked north, too tired to jog. Maybe he should go south, get as far away as possible. No, he had to make the call, to divulge what he saw on the island. After all, there had been some prominent people involved, and he had followed them all the way there. He tried to remember the name of the town, but nothing came to him. He cursed softly. How could he recall the stupid NEHI sign and not the town's name? Jerkwater, Florida. That would do.

He was feeling a craving for a cigarette when he heard the vehicle. A jeep. A jerkwaterite? No, most of them were retirees or fishermen,

both of whom would be in bed early and not up until dawn.

Then he saw the headlights and a light that was playing across the silent bay. He moved inland, through a clump of scrub pine. Working his way slowly, he passed the jeep, careful not to step on anything that didn't look dead. Then he was back on the road, his bare feet thwacking on the cool tar and his chest pounding. (Was that some kind of revenge for his wanting a cigarette? Beneath the light of a single bulb, he spotted the combination oyster bar, gas station. Nobody around. He could see his reflection in the plate-glass window — long neck, bony shoulders, sunken eyes. He looked like a sick crane.

Change. He fumbled in his pocket. Nothing. His wallet was gone too, not that anyone would change a bill now. On the side of the building he found a soft-drink machine. He punched the buttons — the machine had everything but Nehi.

A quarter dropped out, then a dime. It was better than winning in Vegas.

The quarter was just clanging through the phone when the jeep's engine startled him.

THE BIG REDHEAD WASHED THE LAST OF Tuesday's grit from his rough skin. He was tired, as tired as he'd been in a long time. The hot water massaged him making him able to feel in places he thought the day had killed off. How long, he wondered, could he stay in the shower? Forever? No, in another minute the hotel's hot water tank was going to run out, and the water would be cold. He'd settle for a Martell straight, then off to bed for some much-needed sleep.

Faintly he heard a noise. His ears were ringing. No, it was the telephone. He sighed, pulled himself out of the shower, threw a towel over his body. He picked up the phone beside his bed.

"Mike, Mike," panted the familiar voice of Tim Rourke. "I need your help." Shayne heard a dog yelp and what sounded like a boat in the distance.

"Tim," he said, "what is it? Where . . ."

"You've got to come . . . no . . . Nehi . . ."

A gagging sound and the phone went dead.

II

SHAYNE WAS INSTANTLY AWAKE. WITHIN SECONDS ALL THE tiredness vanished. He put on a pot of coffee, and by the time it was ready, so was he. Lacing his cup with some Martell, the redhead sipped the brew and thoughtfully tugged at his earlobe.

One fact: Tim was in trouble. That certainly hadn't been him hang-

ing up. Second, no trace was possible. So where the hell was Tim? It had been a week since he'd seen his reporter friend at the Beef House. Last Tuesday they had chatted half-way through the night at the journalist's booth in the rear, downing enough Hennessey's to drive its stock up. What had they talked about? The Superbowl, skindiving, the new Betamax at Tim's office. Everything and nothing. The investigator replayed the whole evening through his mind, certain that neither one had said a thing about what they were working on.

Shayne began to make calls. So what if he woke up a few people. The stakes were worth it.

The City Editor wasn't too happy to hear the detective's voice, but then Shayne thought, it was poetic justice — didn't Dirksen call Tim at all hours of the night?

"Don't give me that freedom of the press crap, Carl. I'm not prying and I'm not the law — I'm Tim's friend and he's in trouble."

From that point on the newspaperman was cooperative. He narrowed down the stories Rourke might have been working on to three: he had been looking into rumors of a hit squad in Fort Lauderdale; doing a fluff piece on the nouveau riche of the Gold Coast; and following up a lead on how the organized mob was hiring recent refugees.

But which one had he been working on tonight? The redhead refilled his cup and returned to the phone.

"Hi, Angel."

"Mike," she answered lazily. "How were the Keys?"

"Great, but listen." He explained the phone call to her. "Has Tim called the office or come by the last few days that I've been out of town?"

When she could remember nothing, Shayne told his beautiful secretary to go back to sleep. Then he dialed Tim's best friend at the *Miami Daily News*. It rang seven times. Shayne hung up and dialed again. No answer.

"Damn," he said to no one in particular. Now where?

Another thing bothered the detective. Scraping his thumbnail across the harsh, reddish stubble on his chinline, he wondered what Tim had meant by "Knee high."

He could call the police, but there was no guarantee Tim was in trouble in the Miami area. Still . . .

The Miami Chief of Detectives wasn't much happier than Dirksen to hear from him. Shayne waited while Will Gentry went to the living room phone so he wouldn't disturb his slumbering wife. "Christ, Mike, if I sent out a team every time Tim got in water over his head, I

wouldn't have enough men left to keep up with the penny-ante stuff like murder, junk dealing, and bank robbery."

"Dammit, Will, just make a couple of calls for me," Shayne said, trying to restrain his anger.

Gentry sensed the urgency in his friend's voice. "O.K., give me a few minutes."

Half an hour later, Shayne picked up the phone in mid-ring. "Sorry, Mike. Nothing. I even called some of my friends at the Beach. At least, there are no reports of his body being found. A lot of people are on the lookout for him."

Shayne hung up and poured the rest of the coffee down the stained sink. It tasted bitter now. Five o'clock. It would be light soon. He could go down and prowling the beach front, but that would be like trying to catch a minnow in a trawling net.

He picked up the Miami phone book. The classifieds had nothing listed under "knee high." He'd half expected to find some listing for a children's store or . . .

He dialed Joe Roberts again. Twelve rings this time and nothing. One last chance. But that fizzled. Pat, the bartender at the Beef House, hadn't seen Tim since that night a week ago when the three of them had closed the place.

The detective barely had the receiver back in the cradle when exhaustion finally caught up with him.

SHAYNE FELT THE WARM SUN ON HIS SHOULDERS. HE WOKE with a start, mad at himself that he could have dozed off with so much at stake. The case in the Keys must have taken more out of him than he had thought. At least he had been by the phone the rest of the night in case Will or Tim or anybody called.

He put the skillet on the stove, threw in some corn beef hash and eggs. Shaving hurriedly, he donned a fresh shirt, then wolfed down his food — it might be the last he'd have for awhile. As he finished the last of the hash, it struck him that he'd overlooked the obvious.

SHAYNE PULLED THE BUICK UP IN FRONT OF THE APARTMENT building near Flamingo Park. He headed through the lobby and up the self-service elevator to the fourth floor. The lock was a piece of cake.

The Irishman's apartment was more of a mess than usual. The place could have been tossed and no one would have noticed the difference. In the bedroom he found the closet door open and some hangers parted. A search of the medicine cabinet showed both the razor and

shaving cream were missing. Tim was obviously on a trip, but where? There were no brochures, nothing written on the pads that sat beside both phones, and not a single piece of writing on the reporter's desk.

HALF AN HOUR LATER SHAYNE WAS AT TIM'S DESK IN THE corner of the *Daily News*. He had found out why Roberts never answered his phone. The kid was vacationing with his parents in Disneyworld. Dirksen had nothing new to contribute, so Shayne found himself going through the reporter's desk. The bottom left drawer yielded a video cassette. Of course, for the Betamax Tim had been so excited about last Tuesday. Anita, a frail brunette whose eyes crossed behind her coke-bottle glasses, took him to the file room and plopped the cassette in the new machine.

The tape was of Channel 4's news report about a group of wealthy aristocrats near Boca Raton whose lives were a constant whirl of cocktail parties, weekend junkets to the Bahamas, and weekly matches at the Sea Grape Polo and Country Club. One player, an ex-lawyer named Edward McCord, confessed his ambition was to have his own team and win the \$100,000 world cup title the following April.

Tim had packed, Pat hadn't seen him for a week, and only one of the three stories he was working on would have taken him out of Miami. The polo capital of the free world wasn't much to go on, but it was all Shayne had.

III

BY MID-MORNING WEDNESDAY SHAYNE GUIDED THE BUICK up A-1-A. The interstate had been quick, but the downtown area Boca Raton had been clogged with Rolls, Ferraris, and Mercedes. Shayne thought of Palm Beach's Worth Ave. The people here were younger and flashier. The very rich were strange birds, Shayne thought, their migratory habits driven solely by an unnatural desire to be part of the "In crowd." A few years ago it had been the South of France, then Southern California, and now the south of Florida.

The phone book listed only one McCord, Edward on the east side of the Intercoastal Waterway. As Shayne turned into Ponce de Leon Trail, he grinned at what the super-rich passed off as the fountain of youth. Lavish, columned houses amidst immaculate landscaping had sprung up overnight. Everything ready for a nouveau riche jetting in from East Orange or Bluefield — all he needed was a toothbrush and, of course, two million dollars.

McCord's home, the largest, perched on the end of the cul-de-sac. Set behind an army of recently planted royal palms, the pink stucco palace made a definite statement about the ex-lawyer's bank account

and his taste.

Shayne reached out and rang the bell in front of a huge wrought-iron gate. An Hispanic voice came through the speaker. "Name?"

"Michael Shayne."

"Business?"

"Personal."

"Can you be more specific?"

"Look, pal, I'm a P.I. out of Miami, and I need to see McCord urgently."

"Mr. McCord is not in at the present. You will have to return later."

His Irish temper starting to simmer, Shayne was surprised by a horn from behind him. Looking in the mirror, he spotted a virgin-white Mercedes and a blonde with a look in her blue eyes that made a liar out of the car's color.

"Move the antique, fellow," she ordered in a husky voice. "I'm in a hurry."

Shayne got out of the Buick and walked back to her convertible. He noticed she was in her early twenties. "Maybe you can help me, miss."

Without looking up, the well-tanned blonde in a low-cut tennis dress that would have caused even Borg to default, said simply, "Not interested."

"I have a friend," Shayne persisted, "who could be in trouble, and . . ."

She reached into her purse. "If I write you a check for that piece of junk, will you move it?"

Shayne grabbed the car door with both of his huge hands. For the first time the woman looked into the detective's ruggedly handsome features. "On second thought," she purred, flashing a smile that must have instantly turned small boys into men, "perhaps we could negotiate a deal. Mr. . . .?"

"Shayne. Mike Shayne."

A familiar Hispanic voice from the gate area interrupted them. "This creep bothering you, Miss McCord?"

The big detective turned to see two burly men who with their muscles bulging against their t-shirts looked like they lifted weights between skull-cracking sessions.

"Are you bothering me, Mr. Shayne?" she asked in a sultry tone.

He grinned. "That's up to you."

"He's bothering me, Fernando."

The larger of the two reached out for the redhead's shoulder. "Man, you'd better move. See, it's about time for me and Carlos here to put

out the trash." He smiled. "Come to think of it, me and my kid brother ain't had no morning workout yet."

SHAYNE STARTED THEIR SESSION AHEAD OF SCHEDULE. Spinning quickly, he locked both hands and caught the huge Cuban in the solar plexus. As Fernando doubled over in pain, Shayne simultaneously brought his right knee up into his opponent's chin and his knotted hands down on the man's back. Fernando screamed like a whipped dog and began cursing in Spanish.

"Pig," yelled Carlos, rushing Shayne from behind. His charge caught the detective by surprise as did his speed for a big man. Shayne was only half-turned as the raging bull caught him and drove him across the Mercedes' waxed hood. Before he could recover, Carlos' sledgehammer right knocked him to the hot tar. Then the redhead felt a steel-toed shoe dig into his ribs.

Shayne rolled with the kick, but the Cuban kept coming.

"Nice move," the blonde called. Shayne caught a quick glance of her entranced face. "Kick him again."

When Carlos' foot came, Shayne was ready. He grabbed it and twisted till he heard something pop.

"My knee," whelped his adversary.

As Carlos toppled to the pavement, Shayne got to his knees. He drew back his fist, but a slightly recovered Fernando leaped on his back, wrapping his steely arms around the redhead's throat. Shayne stood up, gasping for breath as the Cuban tightened his death grip like a boa constrictor.

"Crush him," the girl squealed. Turned on, she was out for blood.

Shayne started to spin, then stumbled backwards toward the Buick. With all his strength, he drove the husky Cuban into the Buick's nose.

Fernando's grip loosened and he screamed like his brother. With everything Shayne had left, he drove his right fist into Fernando's face. He heard the Cuban's nose crack, and the fight was over.

Hoisting the limp body over his shoulder, he pitched it into the Mercedes' empty seat. The other bodyguard staggered toward the car, and Shayne just shoved him across the luggage area.

"You'd better take your watchdogs to the vet," he said to the blonde.

"To the victor belongs the spoiled," she said, her breasts heaving with excitement.

The redhead looked her in the eye. "I'll settle for a little information. I was told your father's out of town, Miss McCord. Where can I get hold of him?"

"Daddy and a few of his friends have taken a week off from the grueling rigors of polo to go over to the West Coast for some business."

"Where exactly?"

"Manasota — no, Mangrove Key, an island off some little town — Portocall I think Daddy called it. A little south of Sarasota. That's all I know."

"Thanks for showing me how the other half lives," Shayne said as he started for the Buick.

"Couldn't I tempt you with a few pina coladas, a little swim, and . . . whatever?"

"If I'm ever into tennis or masochism, I'll look you up."

As Shayne got into his car, the blonde sulked, "What am I going to do if that guy comes back snooping around? Daddy got rid of the dogs and gave the help the rest of the week off. He cut off my allowance, so I can't even go anywhere."

Shayne's ears perked up. "What did the snooper look like?"

"Skinny guy in a suit that doubles as a sleeping bag. Drove a car that was more beat up than that thing you're in."

Shayne headed the Buick west. He tugged at his earlobe. The cold trail was getting warmer.

IV

EVEN THOUGH THE TEMPERATURE AND THE HUMIDITY WERE in the eighties, Shayne normally would have enjoyed the drive cross state. But before he had reached West Palm and wound past Lake Okeechobee, he realized the longer it took him to find Tim, the greater the chances something bad had happened to his friend. So his accelerator was close to the floor as he passed Fort Myers and turned up 41.

Portocall was a tiny fishing village just below Venice, the kind of place that was usually gobbled up by tourists and retirees tired of the fast lane. Shayne pulled into the town and onto its only paved road. At the end of the street he spotted the sole sign of life. RUDY'S seemed to be everything the town needed — gas station, restaurant, general store.

As Shayne dragged himself out of the car, a black kid who had been sweeping the rotting stoop said, "Watch your car, mister?"

The detective looked around, then laughed. "In case you hadn't noticed, this isn't exactly downtown Miami."

The kid smiled and gestured at the Buick's Dade County plates. "Just tryin' to make a big city dude like you feel at home."

"Where can I find the law around here?" Shayne had decided on the ride over to get all the help he could.

"You mean. Mr. Rudy. Sometimes he be the cook, sometimes the mayor, sometimes the hardware clerk. C'mon! I'll introduce you to Chief of Police Rudy."

THE KID LED HIM THROUGH A DARK MAZE OF TOOLS AND groceries till they came to a restaurant. Sprawled in the only booth was a spaghetti-thin man of about forty-five going on sixty. As they approached him, the man never looked up, but continued grinding his jaws on what the stains around his mouth suggested was the darkest chewing tobacco Shayne had ever seen.

"Mr. Rudy," the lanky youth said, "this here fella be lookin' for you."

"James Edward, now you get back to work," said the uncoiling figure as he finally looked up. "What can I do you for? Got oysters on special — course they're always on special."

"I understand you're the law around here."

"Duly elected." He straightened up in his seat.

"I'm looking for a friend, Edward McCord."

Rudy's eyes widened. "McCord. You work with Mr. McCord?"

"Not exactly, but I need to speak with him. If you could —"

"Mr. McCord, he likes his privacy."

Shayne watched the man rattle a coffee can with his spit, sensing his defensiveness.

"Now, you got business with Mr. McCord, you drive down to the bridge that goes over to his development."

"Mangrove Key?"

"Yeah, but if you're here to bother Mr. McCord, like some others, forget it. Portocall don't need no trouble."

The detective leaned his heavy frame over the table. "Are you his personal bodyguard or the Chief of Police?"

"Don't hardly matter. What hurts Mr. McCord hurts our town. His development is gonna put people to work. Did you look around when you drove in? We need every job we can get. So don't you go messin' up things. Folks round here wouldn't take kindly to that, if you know what I mean."

"Just one more thing, Chief," Shayne said as he lit up a cigarette.

"Have you seen a thin guy driving an old Ford around here?"

"Ain't no guy in no Ford. Now I'm busy." Rudy punctuated his remark by spitting a dark stream of juice into his can.

SHAYNE GROUND OUT HIS CIGARETTE ON THE SAWDUST

floor and headed for the Buick. The late afternoon sun hung over the pines. He looked around — nobody. Then he heard a muffled "Over here."

Walking around the side of the building, Shayne confronted the black kid standing beside a soft-drink cooler.

"Mighty hot, mister. Hard for a kid to talk about what he seen with a dry throat."

Shayne bought two colas. The kid took them both.

"There be a fella in a Ford like I overheard you mention. He was askin' questions coupla days ago. Shoot, he be even skinnier than old Rudy."

"Know where he is now?"

The kid belched loudly. "Naw, but Portocall ain't so big that I couldn't find out somethin', if, of course, I had reason to."

Shayne sprung for another soft drink.

"You jivin' me, dude? You got to pay out if you want the layout."

The redhead peeled off a five. The kid shook his head. Shayne handed him a twenty and glared. "James Edward, when a man takes my money, I expect something in return."

"You got it. Catch you back here in one hour."

"How do I get to the bridge over to Mangrove Key?"

The barefoot kid pointed. "Keep goin' down the road 'bout half a mile."

For a moment Shayne felt a real glimmer of hope. Behind where the kid had been standing was a pay phone and a rusty sign advertising NEHI.

V

THE BRIDGE TO MANGROVE KEY, A HALF-MILE SPAN OF newly poured concrete, offered a stark contrast to the decay that was Portocall. Looming in front of Shayne was a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire and a locked gate. Behind it and to the right sat a solitary guardhouse bearing the sign McCord Properties—NO TRESPASSING. Shayne called out, but all he heard was his echo against the sound of distant boats. If McCord and his associates were on Mangrove Key, they were doing their best to keep it private.

The sun had almost vanished when Shayne returned to Rudy's, which was now dark and silent. Under the naked light beside the building sat James Edward, a streak of grease across his yellowed tank top.

"Hey, dude, I got what you want, but it's gonna cost you a little more."

Shayne got out and walked over to him. He stood directly in front of the would-be shakedown artist and shook his head.

James Edward swallowed hard. "Well, you can't blame a guy for tryin'." He skirted the big detective and jumped into the front seat of the Buick. "Let's go."

FOLLOWING THE KID'S DIRECTIONS, SHAYNE DROVE DOWN A narrow dirt street past lines of dilapidated board shacks. The few men and women sitting listlessly on the front porches looked straight out of the dust bowl. His headlights suddenly glanced off a chain-link fence.

"Pull off," said the kid.

Shayne reached into the tool box welded beneath the car seat and pulled out a flashlight. They got out of the Buick.

"Right there," said his informer.

Shayne trained the light on a gate with the familiar McORD PROPERTIES sign. James Edward led him past the locked gate to a spot in the fence where he pulled back the links.

They slipped in. The two passed a solitary bulldozer as they approached a utility shed. Shayne patted his jacket, feeling the gun in the small of his back. They pushed back a large door.

Caught in his flashlight was Tim's Ford.

Shayne rummaged through the car. Under a seat belt which Tim never wore was a brochure advertising "Mangrove Key—Your West Coast Eden." Shayne glanced at an artist's sketch of a clubhouse and condos, then stuck the brochure in his back pocket.

Two bullets smashed through the utility shed before Shayne heard the report. The big detective pulled out his gun, and in the same motion threw James Edward to the ground. Shayne spun the flashlight out the door. Nothing. Like a snake the detective inched his way outdoors, stopping behind the only cover, the bulldozer.

He heard a screech as a car suddenly took off.

"Heavy," came James Edward's voice. "This is even more fun than spray painting the teacher's lounge. How many kids get shot at?"

Shayne's anger hit the boiling point immediately — at the kid for joking about a dangerous situation and at himself for getting the kid involved in the situation. Whatever was going on around here had just become too risky, and so his first order of business was to get the kid home.

James Edward insisted on being dropped at Rudy's, but wouldn't get out of the Buick.

"Listen, Big City, I want to go with you."

Shayne pulled out his gun. Somehow it had never looked bigger to him. "See this," he said. "It's not a can of spray paint. If you get hit with a bullet from this, you can't rub it off or paint over it. Whoever

shot at me is liable to do it again, and I don't want you around. You understand?"

The kid dropped his head and got out of the car. Shayne pulled away feeling lousy. He didn't like chewing out the kid that way. Normally he would have taken more time to talk with him, but there was something more important he had to do immediately — on Mangrove Key.

SHAYNE WHEELED THE BUICK DOWN A DIRT ROAD THAT paralleled the bay. After a mile or so, he discovered what seemed to be a small public beach and pulled off. Mangrove key squatted on the water like a sleeping duck a good half-mile away. On its southern tip no lights were visible nor could he see any movement.

The detective stripped down to his shorts. He threw his clothes, shoes, and gun into a plastic bag he took out of the Buick's trunk. Cutting a length of rope, he tied it to either end of the sealed bag, making a crude backpack.

The bay water was warm and smooth. The half moon provided just enough light to see by and not to be seen. A powerful swimmer, Shayne moved through the water effortlessly and gracefully. In other circumstances he would have enjoyed the brisk workout, but his mind wouldn't relax its grasp on the question of what had happened to Tim.

Noiselessly the redhead pulled himself out of the water and slipped back into his clothes. He checked his gun — absolutely dry. Overhead a bird cried out and in the brush some night creature answered. Nature seemed calm, but Shayne told himself all wasn't natural on the island. Somewhere on this isolated body were men who had gotten Tim into trouble and him shot at.

Sticking to the shore, he moved silently northward. The island provided him lots of natural cover, but it didn't seem to matter. He saw absolutely no one or heard any human sounds.

Reaching a cove, he glimpsed his first unnatural sign. A light from behind some tall pines. As he headed toward it, he suddenly tripped. Lying on the ground he looked around. Driven into the sand were a series of pine stakes. The new Eden described in the brochure he had found must have been in its first day of creation. The only building he could see was one of those pre-fab metal structures you found at construction sites. Parked side by side in front were the unlikely duo of a brown jeep and a Rolls royce limo.

Like an alligator Shayne crawled toward the building. Still no sign of anyone. He crept closer to the light, which he could now tell was coming from a small window. Stepping on a broken orange crate, he peered in cautiously.

Sitting around a makeshift table were four men in silk shirts and golf slacks playing cards. One of them he recognized from the videotape as Edward McCord. What the hell was going on? This quartet hadn't travelled across the state to sit in a metal shack and play poker.

Shayne felt the cold steel against his neck before he heard anything.

"Turn around slowly, senior. Very slowly," commanded an unseen voice.

Shayne pivoted as ordered. The fact he had been sneaked up on successfully told him he was dealing with pros.

A light caught his face. He blinked a couple of times. When he could see clearly, he knew he was in trouble.

Staring at him were three Uzis held by a trio in green army fatigues.

VI

ONE OF THE CAPTORS SHOVED HIS UZI INTO THE REDHEAD'S ribs. Another reached out and took the .38 automatic from Shayne's belt. The third opened the door to their right. Like a steer in the stockyards, Shayne was driven into the metal building.

For the first time Shayne noticed a fifth figure inside. Dressed in fatigues, wearing a full beard, and chewing on a big cigar, he looked like a young Fidel Castro. The figure was momentarily caught off-guard. He shot a glance at the four card players who had turned to see the source of the commotion. Then he inhaled on his cigar and his steel eyes shifted to Shayne.

"This island is very private, senior."

"I was just out for a midnight swim, saw your light, and thought I'd drop in," answered the detective.

The butt of a gun drove into his kidneys. He flinched but didn't make a sound at the pain lancing his body.

"You have a smart mouth, my friend. It is too bad your brain is not its equal," said the bearded man who Shayne concluded was the uniformed group's leader. "Now tell me why a man would sneak onto this island at night with a gun?"

"A little snipe hunting, maybe," came Shayne's reply.

This time the gun butt struck the redhead in the back of the neck, sprawling him in front of the card players. Shayne had been in tight spots like this before. Instinctively he knew that anonymity was his best chance at self-preservation. What he needed most now was time — even if the best way to buy it was with pain.

One of the greyhairs around the table looked down at Shayne and said with alarm, "My god, man, don't make things worse. We're dealing with Alpha Red."

The name didn't ring a bell, but the heavy bootheel clanged against

his skull just before he lost consciousness.

THE DARK TUNNEL SEEMED SHORTER NOW. IN THE MIDST OF a distant, dim light four faces hovered.

"He's starting to come around," a voice said.

Shayne dragged himself to his knees, then felt hands helping him to his feet.

"You O.K., fella?"

The redhead forced the pain to go away. He was still in the pre-fab building with the card players. The soldiers of Alpha Red had vanished. Picking McCord's face out of the group, he started to piece together what he had seen.

Suddenly one of the men started banging his fists on the table. "They're gonna kill us! I know they are. They're gonna kill us."

"Calm down, Jerry," said McCord.

"We'd better fill in our visitor on what's been happening here," said another.

Rubbing the back of his swollen neck, Shayne interrupted the frightened speaker. "I think I've got a pretty good idea of what's been going down. McCord here has this development project. He needs some investors to get it off the ground. He chooses some of his friends from the club and brings them over here to check out the project."

"How did you know Ed?" said a startled figure whose face looked vaguely familiar to Shayne. "And how did you find out about Mangrove Key? This was supposed to be a secret."

"Somehow the Alpha Red group discovered what was going on," said Shayne, "and moved in. My guess is they're holding you for ransom."

McCord stepped forward. "And just who are you?"

"Someone looking for a friend," Shayne returned. "Did any of you meet a reporter from the Miami *Daily News* named Rourke?"

Each man shook his head. A frown formed on the redhead's craggy features. "Are you sure? Rourke's scarecrow-thin and drives a beat-up Ford."

NOBODY SHOWED ANY RECOGNITION. SHAYNE WAS GETTING nowhere. All the evidence pointed to Tim's being on the island. Why, then, had none of them seen his friend? Shayne tried not to dwell on the obvious conclusion that Alpha Red had found him first. He wouldn't let his mind believe that Tim was beyond help.

"The first thing we have to worry about," Shayne said, "is getting out of here in one piece."

"Why should we?" asked McCord. "Right now my assistant, Remaley, is busy making the arrangements that will get us out of here safely. He should be able to put together the money by dawn at the latest. All we need do is to sit tight and wait."

The typical mentality of the rich, thought Shayne. Money can buy anything, get you out of any situation.

"They're going to kill us," blurted the short, round man whom McCord had called Jerry.

"You'd better listen to him," Shayne spat out. He was beginning to let his disgust show. "Kidnappers like our friends outside don't leave witnesses. Once they get their money, you're dead meat."

"They gave us their word," said one of the men.

"Did it come with a gentleman's handshake?" Shayne asked sarcastically.

Suddenly the door burst open and a body came hurtling in. Staggering to his feet, a small man in a plaid suit tried to catch his breath.

"Remaley," said McCord. "What happened?"

"Raoul is angry at how long it's taking to get the ransom together," the assistant said.

The man whom Shayne thought he had seen before spoke up. "Why is it that everybody thinks that wealthy people carry around millions as though it were pocket change. Don't they understand investments, treasury bills, liquidity?"

"Guys like Raoul understand one thing," said the redhead. "You've got the money and they want it, whatever way it takes." The detective tugged at his earlobe. "Remaley, you were just out there. How many men are there?"

"At least twenty, maybe a few more."

The redhead glanced around. It was going to be difficult. The only possible exits were the single window and door, which would be heavily guarded.

"Since we're all in this together," said the familiar-looking man, "perhaps we should introduce ourselves. I'm John Harrow."

Instantly Shayne knew why he thought he had seen the face before. He had. John Harrow had been the movies' favorite leading man till he grew too old to ride the range or board pirate ships. Unlike a lot of his contemporaries, he had not only found gold in those Hollywood hills — he had banked it.

"This is Jerry Stokes of Stokelectronic. The Japanese car company that bought him out made him an even wealthier man." Harrow pointed to a mute figure still seated at the table. "This is Chad Phelps of the Massachusetts Phelps. He went from captain of the Harvard

eleven to a captain of industry with graduation and now owns more land than most countries."

Shayne looked at the four older men, each retired and each in his 60's. A lot of help they would be. All they had to offer was money. He needed more.

His thoughts were interrupted by the opening of the door. Two of Raoul's men hurried in and grabbed the big detective while a third held a gun on the group.

"You come with us, big mouth," said one of them. "We'll see how smart you are. When we do nice things to you, you will tell us what we need to know."

Shayne had just been thinking that at least he had until dawn the next day to figure out something. Suddenly his time had been drastically reduced.

VIII

THE OUTSIDE AIR WAS COOLER THAN THE BUILDING, AND A night breeze rustled the bushes and trees. Shayne sized up the situation quickly as they pushed him over the sand. None of the remaining seventeen soldiers was visible. Maybe they were having a meeting.

"Wait here," said the man in charge. "I get Raoul."

Shayne backed up a step, deliberately putting both captors in front of him. The baggy-uniformed guards were about five feet apart and about two feet from him.

"Cigarette?" the detective asked, shifting his glance back and forth.

The man on the right shrugged his shoulders. Letting his gun momentarily hang from its strap, he reached with his right hand to his jacket pocket.

For a split second the guard on the left let his eyes wander to his friend's actions.

Forgetting the occupied soldier, Shayne struck. His left hand slapped the Uzi outward while he pivoted on his left foot. With all his strength he rammed his right knee into the soldier's groin. The captor dropped to his knees abruptly, wailing like a new-born child. Shayne spun around furiously. The other guard was dropping his cigarette lighter and reaching for his gun.

Shayne beat him to it. He grabbed the Uzi and tugged. The guard swung round and crashed into his fallen comrade. Shayne threw two quick punches. It was all he had to.

The big detective was about to roll over one of his captors and grab a gun, both of which were at the bottom of the pile, when he heard Raoul's voice. "Juan, Esteban. Que pasa?"

Then a gun burped fire from behind the voice.

SHAYNE WAS ALREADY RUSHING INTO THE PALM COVER when the slugs bit the sand where he had been moments before. Zigzagging through the thick undercover, Shayne realized quickly he could make the best time on the western beach. Reaching it, he began to move northward on the wet sand which seemed to be trying to suck him downward with each step.

He estimated he had put about half a mile between him and his captors' headquarters when the disappearing moon illuminated a run-down beachhouse. Shayne crawled up to its base and peered through some cracks in the rotted sea fir. It was dark, but he could make out a lump huddled in the far corner. Shayne crept closer. The lump was a man. No movement.

The redhead's heart skipped a beat involuntarily in fear of what he might find. Seeing no one else about, he stepped through an open window and flicked on his lighter.

The tied and gagged figure was Tim, his face covered with sand that had crusted with blood. If Tim were dead — Shayne's anger mounted. Not after all these years. Not in some godforsaken shack in the middle of nowhere. Not Tim. The detective had watched too many of his friends go.

He felt for a pulse.

Tim was alive — but barely.

Carefully Shayne removed the gag and untied his limp friend. The reporter was slowly starting to come around. He looked weak, probably from hunger and loss of blood.

"Mike, you old sonofabitch," exclaimed the Irishman as his eyes flicked open, "what took you so long?"

Shayne laughed in relief.

"You're the ugliest St. Bernard I've ever seen, and I bet you forgot the brandy too," Tim joked through the pain.

Yes, Tim was alive and so was his sense of humor. Gradually and gently Shayne massaged his friend's limbs to get the circulation going.

"Come on, Tim," urged the redhead, "we've got to get out of here. They're after me."

"The kooks in the army suits?" Tim uttered.

"How did you get yourself in such a mess?" the detective asked, his grey eyes scanning the brush.

"Journalist burnout. I'd done so many stories on violence and death that I thought I'd take a little R & R with a puff piece on the other half." Shayne's old friend chuckled to himself. "Some irony, isn't it? I can spend the night in Little Havana and nothing happens to me, but a few days in McCord's 'West Coast Eden' and I end up with this."

Tim pulled back his bloody shirt. For the first time Shayne saw the bullethole in the journalist's left side just above the heart. A trickle of blood still flowed.

Carefully Shayne picked up his friend and began to carry him. In the distance he heard a whine.

"Those damned hellhounds," said Rourke.

Shayne worked his way back to the beach. It was harder carrying his friend through the shallow ocean water, but he hadn't heard of the dog yet that could follow such a trail.

Tim was asleep again, and dawn was only a few hours away when the big detective reached the northern tip of the island. From this point the mainland shore looked even farther away than the portion he had swum earlier.

Several questions shot through Shayne's mind. How critical was Tim? How was he going to get his friend off the island? Swimming him over was dangerous, if not impossible. Besides, if he concentrated all his efforts on just saving the loveable Irishman, he was as good as signing death warrants for the other five men who had only till dawn to live.

He made his decision quickly. His best chance would be to do the thing Raoul would least expect.

IX

A BIRD CALLING OUT OVERHEAD TOLD SHAYNE DAWN wasn't too far away. From where he lay he could count four guards. The two on the bridge were given away by the orange glow of their cigarettes, while two others had just come out of the metal building with Remaley. The aide to McCord looked under a great deal of pressure.

Suddenly one of the men with Remaley turned and left. He walked down a path till he came to a tent and disappeared within. Shayne figured the rest of the army was somewhere around the northern point.

The big redhead, deciding to take them one at a time, chose the soldier talking to Remaley to be first. As he crawled closer, Shayne could see the guard's hand was not on his gun. Of course it would have been difficult for a man of Remaley's small size to overpower even a paperboy.

In his hand the detective grasped a pine knot. He had found it in the grove of trees on the camp's outskirts where he had left Tim. With a few yards to go, Shayne got to his knees, then his feet. When the detective had come up behind the guard, Remaley spotted him and his eyes shifted to Shayne.

The guard must have sensed something too, for he spun around. Shayne swung the club with two hands like a baseball bat. He caught

the soldier on the side of the skull, causing a cracking sound that reminded the detective of a home run.

"What the — " exclaimed Remaley.

Shayne handed McCord's aide the guard's gun. The alternative would have been to give the still-suited figure the pine knot, thus rendering him useless.

"Follow me," commanded the detective. "We're going for the two guys on the bridge."

Remaley surprised the redhead the way he followed him from tree to tree, then on his stomach. He motioned for Remaley to take the right guard. Slowly Remaley moved in.

The left guard saw Remaley as Shayne knew he would. As the distracted soldier stepped toward McCord's aide, Shayne raised the club and whacked it over the guard's hands. The Uzi clattered to the sand. As Shayne reached for it, he heard a sharp command.

"One more movement, buddy, and you're dead."

It was Remaley.

Damn!

"Don't say a word," cautioned the aide. "Just march right back to the others. Rico," he said to the conscious guard, "stay with me till we toss him inside."

With two guns somewhere behind him, the detective did as he was told. The elderly quartet seemed surprised to see him.

"They told us they had executed you," Harrow informed him.

The big redhead said, "It was a lie designed to help keep you in line." He walked over to the table and looked at McCord. "I know how Alpha Red found out about your secret enterprise here — Remaley."

"Peter?" said the industrialist. "But he came to me with the highest of credentials."

"That mistake doesn't matter now," said the detective, rasping a thumbnail across his chin. His gray eyes scanned the four men. The plan he had been working on would have to begin right away — Tim's life and theirs depended on it. "Now pay attention," he ordered. "Here's what we're going to do."

The four men listened quietly with complete attention. It was the kind of concentration that had helped them to the top. Their interest improved their chances, but the odds were still heavily weighted against them.

McCord put up one final protest in the name of safety. Harrow probably spoke for the other two when he said, "Edward, if my time is up, I want to go out like a man — not a whimpering coward."

In other circumstances, Shayne thought, it would have sounded like

a line from one of Harrow's movies, but right here and now he sensed its truth — for all of them. In coming back Shayne knew he had made the right decision.

"JUAN, ESTEBAN, RICO — YOU SPANISH PIGS," CALLED OUT the voice. "Get in here and get your leader out."

The door to the metal building was thrown open, and two uniformed guards peered in looking for Raoul. Even watching Harrow, Shayne found it difficult to believe the ex-actor could imitate Raoul's Spanish accent so perfectly.

"Raoul?" questioned one of the intruders. "Where are you?"

The lights in the building went out. Shayne didn't know how Jerry had done it, but the former owner of Stokelectronics had struck exactly as he said he would — on cue.

Like pulling guards, Shayne and Phelps leveled the surprised soldiers with cross-body blocks.

"They went down easier than a couple of boola-boolas," quipped the Harvard grad, his satisfaction overflowing.

McCord scooped up their guns. Shayne took them both, checked them, then pitched one to the industrialist. He put McCord on the right flank. He took the left and led them to the pine grove where Tim lay. Harrow and Phelps picked up the reporter and, holding him in a fireman's carry, transported him to the Rolls Royce.

The detective then crept back to the bridge with Stokes and McCord. When he and the ex-electronics entrepreneur had positioned themselves, he signalled McCord to step into the first light.

Hesitantly McCord did as he was told. The two soldiers saw him simultaneously and turned. While they were momentarily off-guard, Shayne struck, swinging the Uzi into one's face. The other guard pivoted toward Shayne. As he did, the formerly scared Jerry Stokes crowned him with a piece of driftwood. Hit for the second time in a short while, the guard dropped as though shot.

Shayne tied them up as he had the earlier two in the building. It had taken only a few minutes and it had been accomplished in silence. Harrow gave him the high sign. The keys had been left in the Silver Ghost, and the group was ready to roll. Harrow, Stokes, and Phelps lifted Tim into the rear seat and then crowded into the jump seat of the limo.

"Still want to wait?" Shayne asked McCord.

For a moment the industrialist looked a bit indecisive. Then he raised the Uzi and pointed it at Shayne.

"This has gone too far to stop," glared McCord.

"Edward, what are you doing?" questioned the actor.

"Put down the gun, man," said Phelps. "We've got to get out of here. You don't know what you're doing."

"He knows exactly what he's doing," the detective said. "You don't think Remaley had the brains to figure this thing out?"

"Raoul, Remaley," called out McCord. "Get out here quick before it all goes down the tubes."

"It's already down," said Shayne calmly walking toward the gun pointed at his gut. "Go ahead and fire."

CORNERED, MCCORD PULLED THE TRIGGER. NOTHING happened.

"I removed the clip when we took those guns from the guards."

"How did you know?" asked McCord.

Remaley and Raoul came racing down the path. The cigar-smoker was carrying a gun while Remaley was unarmed.

"Drop it, Raoul," Shayne commanded.

Raoul had only lifted the gun from his waist when Shayne opened up. One blast threw the charging soldier up against a tall pine, the dark, wet liquid staining his green fatigues. Remaley surrendered instantly.

"We've still got to hurry," urged Phelps. "The other soldiers will hear the shots —"

"There aren't any other soldiers," said the detective.

"Remaley counted at least twenty," reminded Harrow.

"Yeah," countered the redhead, "but we only had his word for it. I was all over this island and never saw more than five."

"But Alpha Red?" pressed Stokes.

"There's no such thing as Alpha Red. McCord simply made the group up. Yesterday his daughter told me he gave his help some time off — in the middle of the week! So a bunch of gardeners and house-boys become weekday warriors, complete with guard dogs."

"But why?" Harrow was as puzzled as the rest.

"McCord here didn't plan for his retirement as well as the rest of you. His daughter suggested as much when she told me he cut off her allowance. Mangrove Key was going to be his goldmine, but he ran out of funds."

"I was desperate," admitted the industrialist. "I knew I couldn't con all of you."

"They'd have grown as suspicious as I did," said the detective.

"There's only one building up, and who can build a resort community with only one bulldozer? That's why I gave McCord the unloaded gun. I had my suspicions, but I had to be sure."

"But, Edward," said Harrow, "we ate at each other's table, we shared our lives for the last year. If you were in trouble, why didn't you ask for help?"

"You weren't my friends," spat out McCord. "You never really accepted me. I just wasn't in your league financially. Then, the risky investments I made trying to keep up with you turned sour. I knew with the ransom money I could continue to travel in your circles, maybe get some respect."

Stokes, who had been silent throughout the entire revelation, stepped toward McCord. "One thing, Edward. You wouldn't really have . . . killed us after you got the money . . . would you?"

McCord's silence confirmed what Shayne had told them earlier.

THOUGH TIM HAD BEEN IN THE VENICE HOSPITAL FOR ONLY one day, the rumpled sheets and soiled gown suggested to Shayne that he had already made it his home.

"I don't know if I can take a week in this place, Mike. Are you sure you can't help me escape?" joked the Irishman.

"You need the rest," said Shayne, "and besides you have three millionaires picking up the tab. You said you wanted a little rest and relaxation — enjoy it."

"I've never seen people so grateful."

The big detective waved it off. "It's not what I did for them so much as what they found out they could still do for themselves. I had them underestimated. When the chips were down, those guys had a lot of guts."

"There's only one thing that would make this occasion perfect," said Rourke.

Shayne turned to the door. "O.K.," he called.

"Room service," said a smiling James Edward as he came in carrying a tray on which were a bottle and three glasses.

The reclining reporter picked up the bottle. "Three-Star John Exshaw — just what the doctor ordered."

Shayne poured the liquor into two glasses. James Edward held out the third one. From his coat pocket, the redhead pulled a bright can and popped the tab. He filled James Edward's glass with Nehi soda and then offered a toast. "Here's looking at you, kid." ●

It was a crazy offer, and only a madman would accept it!

The Legacy

by ALAN WARREN

I STILL GET GOOSEFLESH THINKING OF IT.

It began in Le Bouc, a French restaurant a stone's throw from Dallas — that is, if the stone were encased within a guided missile. My traveling companion and I had sat down for a drink, having heard the bar prices were reasonable. I doubt we had twenty dollars between us.

It was a blistering hot day, the kind that numbs the senses and fries the brain to the texture of a fine Swiss cheese, and the reason most Texans wear wide brimmed ten gallon hats had just occurred to me: the brims protected the wearer's forehead from the sun's fearsome rays. Of course!

"The armpit of the nation," Landry suddenly announced, apropos of nothing. He spoke so loudly I glanced around to make certain no one had overheard. I was suddenly aware that both of us were conspicuous non-Texans by our lack of hats, Levi's, and rangy drawls, and were, for that reason, interlopers.

"What makes you say that?" I said, and instantly regretted asking, realizing it would lead into one of Landry's monologues filled with machismo, seasoned with chauvinism, and leavened with the occasional off-color remark or description.

"Because these sonsabitches have all the money in the world, and they flaunt it," he said.

"Do I detect a note of jealousy there?"

"Damn straight. You know what I could do with the kind of money in this state? This drifting around is for cockroaches. If I had one tenth the money of one of those sonsabitches in Dallas, I'd plant my ass down in Big D and stay, y'know? Get me one of those estates with a winding driveway so long you run outta gas just driving in from the front gate. Y'know?"

"I know," I said. I'd heard this diatribe before, and although it changed slightly in the re-telling, it was essentially the same tirade I'd heard during our travels through Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico. And it always began after a drink, or two, or three. Up until then, Landry was a pleasant enough companion.

"I'd do anything to get that kinda dough," Landry was saying. "Anything. I wouldn't care who I'd have to screw."

The waiter drew abreast of our table. "Another?" he asked.

I was about to say no. My chamois-thin wallet wouldn't permit it, but Landry rumbled before I could speak. "Yeah, two more."

The waiter nodded, took our empty glasses away, and left.

I could have questioned the wisdom of ordering drinks when our pocketbooks were rubbed raw and we had little hope of getting back to California, but decided against it. Landry was again speaking of his obsessions, and he was a dangerous man to cross, even verbally.

"These sonsabitches think money'll buy anything, and maybe they're right. Truthfully, I couldn't stand living here. Too hot, for one thing. And the women — most of 'em are high priced whores."

"Are you talking about Dallas," I asked, "or Texas in general?"

Landry shrugged. "The whole damn South. I couldn't stand being here more than a couple of days. You think we could —"

The waiter returned with two double bourbons on a tray. He set them down before us, and before I could pay for mine Landry dropped a five dollar bill, folded lengthwise, on the tray. "Keep the change," he said. The waiter stared down a moment, looked as if he were about to comment and thought better of it, and carried the tray away.

"Thanks," I said, sipping my drink. I was about to comment on it when I froze.

ACADEMICIANS WILL TELL YOU THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A sixth sense, but they in turn will proffer no explanation for the unmistakable sensation any animal, including man, experiences when he is being watched. He may not see, smell, hear, taste, or touch the observer, but he is nonetheless aware of his presence. I was thus fully cognizant of the rangy Texan standing directly behind me before I

turned and stared up at him.

He was Texas personified. His black Stetson, string tie, and enormous stature spoke of oil and wild Mustangs and flashy bankrolls. There was even something about his stance that suggested the wide open spaces: it was not arrogant or showy, merely self-confident. I would have been willing to wager, without even glancing down at his feet, that he was wearing a tall pair of boots with spurs. And I would have been right.

"Y'all have to excuse me," he said, and the drawl was thick enough to cut with a pearl-handled knife, "but I was listenin' t'some of what yuh was sayin. Don't git the idea ah'm the kinda fella listens in on private conversations, but I caught yer general drift, an it kinda intrigued me. Yuh said there's a general feelin' roun these parts that money'll buy anythin'."

"That's right," said Landry. He did not look embarrassed or even surprised. I had to give him credit for a certain bravery: he was not one to step back from a challenge or an obstacle. He was hot headed, certainly, but he was not without the courage of his convictions. You had to give him that.

The stranger pushed his hat back, exposing a high, lined forehead and, above it, a mane of thinning gray hair. He might have been a retired Western star, or a champion rodeo rider, or a cardsmith. But I had a premonition he was none of these things.

"Well, that may be the feelin, but y'all excuse me if I tell yuh there's at least one thinget money cain't buy. No, sir. And that's courage."

"Courage?" Landry repeated.

The Texan nodded, then glanced from Landry to me and asked, "Y'all mind if I sit down here?"

Landry shook his head and indicated a chair.

The big man sank into it and exhaled, then looked up with a startled expression as if he had just been caught cheating at cards.

"Shucks, I forgot t'introduce m'self. That's downright rude. M'names DuBose. John Jacob DuBose. J.J. to m'friends."

He reached out a hand the size of a small ham, and pumped Landry's first, then mine.

"This is Paul Gardner," Landry said, indicating me. "My name's Steve Landry."

"Pleased t'meet both o'you," the Texan said. "Yer not from this part o'the country, ah'd wager."

"No," Landry said. "I'm from San Diego originally, and Paul's from San Francisco."

J.J. DuBose winked at me. "Nice city," he said, putting an end to

that phase of the conversation and turning his attention back to Landry. As he spoke he fished a golden cigarette case out of his pocket, shook a cigarette loose, and then spun the wheel of a gold-plated cigarette lighter that bore on its side the single gleaming monogrammed letter D. That done, he touched the flame to the cigarette and said, "But we was speakin o'courage. I wish t'~~God~~ money could buy that, cause ah'd . . ."

He broke off, and glanced from Landry to me.

"Ah'll level with you boys. Yer lookin' at a dyin' man."

The incongruity of his statement must have struck us both at once: J.J. DuBose looked perhaps sixty years of age, and everything about his appearance, from his burly forearms with their timberline of dark curling hair to his powerful voice, suggested he might live to be a hundred.

NOTING OUR APPRAISAL OF HIS PHYSICAL CONDITION, HE shook his head. "Don't let appearances fool ya. Ah'm eaten up with cancer. That's what comes o'smokin five packsa Chesterfields a day over forty years. There ain't no doubt of it: ah've been t'every g.p. an every cancer specialist from here t'Tuscaloosa, an it cost me sixteen Gs t'hear the same thing from ever one of em: ah'm crawlin with the things. They're all over me, in muh lungs, muh colon, muh liver. They probably reached muh brain b'now." The Texan took a deep drag off his cigarette and smiled wistfully. "But it's OK. Ah'm resigned t'that. It don't scare m'none. Hail, everbody gotta die sometime. Ah've had a good life: ah've been with a lotta women — if y'catch muh meanin — ah've made a lotta money, ah've gotta nice spread. Ah coulda died, wheezin and coughin, twenty years ago an ah didn't. The lord been lookin after me fer a long time. But that ain't m'point."

He drew his chair closer to the table. The wistful expression was gone now, replaced by one of remarkable earnestness.

"The point is ah ain't got too much time left on God's earth, an the land an the money has gotta go somewhar after ah kick. Ah ain't got nobody t'leave it to. Nobody deservin, that is." He scowled. "Ah'm single now, but ah was married oncet. To a Mexican woman, name o'Juanita. She's dead now a good five years. She was fifteen years younger'n me, and I outlasted her."

He smiled bitterly at the memory, then went on:

"Anyways, we had a son. But he ain't a DuBose. Not by a country mile. An d'you know why? Cause he lacks the greatest dang thing God ever give us: courage. Truth t'tell, he's the most miserable bastard was ever whelped. He's off livin somewhar in Mexico now. I ain't even

heard of him since afore his mother died. Dint even come t'the funeral. Some people are like at. I guess it's somethin yer born with, like a suck-egg dog, they's nothin y'can do for em; y'either get rid of em or shoot em. I can't very well shoot m'own boy, so I disowned em. Point bein: who in hail'm I gonna leave m'money to?" He stubbed his cigarette out in the ashtray.

I glanced over at Landry. To my surprise he was listening to the Texan's every word. I thought it an appropriate time to speak. "Who are you going to leave it to?"

J.J. DuBose turned to look at me, and smiled a crooked smile that even now makes me distinctly ill at ease just to recall it.

"Don't know that," he said. "But I kin tell you this: it'll be someone with courage. Someone who kin show me he has guts, who'll take anythin I kin hand im an come back fer more. You show me somebody who measures up t'that an I will write him a check that's good at any bank in this dang state fer ten thousand dollars. An that is fer real."

I don't recall if he brought his fist crashing down on the table to round off his spiel with the proper punctuation mark, but it seems to me he did.

At this point the waiter returned to our table. Catching sight of our companion, the waiter smiled amiably and said, "I didn't realize they were friends of yours, Mr. DuBose." Then, turning to us: "Drinks are always on the house for a friend of Mr. DuBose's."

The Texan smiled again and said, "Y'see? Ah cain't even give m'money away. Everwhere I go they tell me m'money's no good. Shore is nice t'be liked." To the waiter he said, "Gimme a stinger, Albert."

The waiter smiled and nodded, and said, "How about it, boys? Another?"

"A double bourbon," Landry said. I noticed he had consumed all of his while listening to our acquaintance. The waiter turned to me, but I shook my head and said, "No, I'm fine."

As soon as the waiter had departed J.J. DuBose leaned across the table and, speaking directly to Landry now, said, "Ten thousand U.S. dollars shore buys a lotta bourbon."

"What are we talking about?" Landry asked suddenly. "What does a person have to do to satisfy you? What kind of courage are you looking for? Someone to rob a bank — is that it?"

The Texan went into a laughing fit I thought would never stop. His broad shoulders shook with a rhythm so emphatic and well-coordinated it looked choreographed. During this fit I glanced over at Landry. His face never changed expression: he was staring intently at J.J. DuBose, and there was not an ounce of humor, or human warmth, on his

features. The big man continued to laugh until his chuckles turned into a wracking cough that continued to convulse him until at length it subsided.

When J.J. DuBose was again able to speak he said, "Hail, I don't want you robbin no bank. I got more money in m'safe at home than most banks in this state got in their vaults. Besides, that wouldn't prove nothin other than what a fool y'were t'do such a damfool thing. Naw; t'earn the ten thousand I want y't'do somethin not one man in ten thousand would have the nerve t'do."

The waiter returned with the drinks. Nearly everyone beside our party had cleared out, I noticed, for the restaurant closed at midday; the hubbub of conversation heard earlier had been reduced to an ominous silence. I knew we would not be asked to leave: the waiter's every movement, and the very intonation of his voice, showed he paid deference to J.J. DuBose.

"How bout it, boy?" DuBose finally asked. "Have y'got the stuff?"

Landry took a gulp of bourbon, then set the glass down on the table with a steady hand. "Try me," he said.

THE TEXAN NEVER TOOK HIS EYES OFF HIM, AS THOUGH afraid he might turn tail and run the second he was unwatched. "Albert," he called. The waiter reappeared. Sensing him behind him, but not turning in his chair to look, DuBose said, "You know what to bring me. A cupful. And make sure it's hot."

The waiter nodded and said, "Yes sir, Mr. DuBose. Right away." He turned and walked off toward the back of the restaurant and disappeared into the kitchen.

"This is just a little, I guess you'd call it a test, o'mine," J.J. DuBose said. "I've tried it on people before, an, d'you know, not a one — not one — of em's passed it."

"I'll pass it," Landry said.

DuBose stared at him, and his eyes seemed to bore into Landry's, as if plumbing his depths. "We'll see," he finally said.

Fully ten minutes passed in excruciating silence, during which I do not believe J.J. DuBose once took his eyes off Landry. I rose from my chair at one point simply to stretch, but did not say anything. The atmosphere was filled with the kind of tenseness that forbids speech. I had begun to feel queasy, as though it were I and not Landry who was being tested, and by the time the waiter appeared from the back it was such a relief to have someone break the stillness that I exhaled loudly.

"Just set it on the table there, Albert," DuBose instructed. The waiter did as he was told. All the gaiety he had displayed earlier had

left his features; he looked like a man with an unpleasant duty to perform. He placed the object he was carrying very carefully on the center of the table, exercising the greatest of care in standing it upright and taking very great care indeed not to spill it.

It was a beaker, filled nearly to the brim with a liquid of some kind, a vaguely metallic bluish-gray in color. I could not for the life of me identify it.

"There's a chemical shop built onto the back of this restaurant," DuBose said. "An whenever I want t'test somebody I just ask Albert here t'go an git me m'testin tool."

Pointing to the beaker, he said with deliberate, almost preternatural, calmness, "This here's filled with molten lead."

I did not say a word. I found it actually physically difficult to take my eyes away from the beaker and glance over at Landry. He was sitting staring at the beaker as though incapable of speech. What in the name of God, I wondered, is going through his head at this moment? The only thing I could think was, Let's pack up and get the hell out of this place right now.

But Landry showed no signs of wanting to leave. He looked up from the beaker and said to DuBose, "What do you want me to do?"

The Texan smiled his crooked smile and said, "I want y'to prove t'me yer a man with the stuff. I want y'to earn those ten Gs." Then, softly: "I want you t'put yer right index finger into that lead all the way up to the knuckle."

I GASPED. IT WAS THE NATURAL REACTION OF ONE WHO HAS had as much of an emotional strain as he can stand.

J.J. DuBose glanced over at me and drawled, "You kin leave if you've a mind to, Mr. Gardner, though I'd think a man like Mr. Landry here'd want his friend t'stay with im when he does this."

Landry had apparently not been fazed by the request. He abruptly asked, "If I do, what's going to happen to me afterwards? I'll need a doctor."

J.J. DuBose smiled again. "Albert here's had three years in the medical department at the University of Texas. I know, cause I paid for em. He'll know what t'do; he'll bandage you up as good as a hospital'd do, mebbe better. He's been on hand ever time I get a volunteer. But we ain't had need o'his services yet." Again the wide crooked smile.

Landry glanced over at me. Our eyes met for just a second, and I gave him an impassioned look that I hoped said exactly what I was thinking: Let's go, let's get away.

Instead, he turned back to face J.J. DuBose and said, "Write out the check."

It was clearly the moment the Texan had been waiting for. With a chuckle he slid a checkbook out of his coat pocket, laid it on the table in front of him, then produced a gold-plated fountain pen. With it he inscribed Landry's name on the topmost check and, below it, the amount: TEN THOUSAND AND NO CENTS.

I stood up. "Maybe everyone around here is crazy but me," I said, "but if you think I'm going to —"

"Sit down," said Landry.

I glared at him. I wondered if he could feel the anger, and even the hatred, I felt for him at that moment for playing along with the old Texan, for playing the part in the old man's fantasy that every other applicant had turned down before.

DuBose finished signing the check, tore it out of the checkbook, and held it up for Landry's approval. "There. All signed and legal-like. Good in any bank in this state. If yuh like yuh kin phone the bank — any bank — an ask if J.J. DuBose's credit is good. Yuh won't find anyone that'll turn y'down."

"I don't need to call the bank," Landry said. He was still staring at DuBose. Now his eyes fell away from him and settled on the beaker. "That's all I have to do — stick my finger in up to the knuckle, and the ten thousand's mine?"

The Texan smiled. "That's all, honey."

Landry began nodding. It was the kind of unconscious head movement I have witnessed divers in Acapulco make just before launching themselves from the steepest cliffs into the waters far, far below.

Landry cleared his throat, and the sound echoed throughout the room, empty but for the four of us. He flexed his hand and clenched it in a fist, then unclenched it.

I held my breath and waited.

The hand arced slowly toward the beaker and then stopped, poised above it. With what seemed to me intolerable slowness it clenched once more into a fist, all the fingers but one. The right index finger.

J.J. DuBose leaned forward. He was making an unconscious noise somewhere deep in his throat, and his teeth were bared, as if he were a large animal about to pounce on one smaller.

Landry's finger descended slowly, slowly, towards the bluish-gray liquid inside the beaker. The finger stopped abruptly, as if it had reached an impassable barrier.

Landry flinched.

And then the barrier was suddenly lifted, and he plunged his finger into the liquid.

I STOOD UP, ALL MY SENSES TINGLING, MY NERVES FRAYED to the breaking point. I was waiting for the inevitable scream of agony Landry was about to emit. No man, no matter how nerveless, could withstand having his finger burned to the bone without screaming himself hoarse and collapsing.

Yet Landry had done it. He did not even open his mouth, nor did his face register pain or shock or even discomfort. His only expression was one of mild surprise.

He raised his finger from the liquid. It was dripping wet, but was its normal pinkish hue. It was no more burned or singed than if he had dipped it in a glass of tap water.

J.J. DuBose let out a whoop of sheer joy, and at once he was out of his chair and shaking Landry's hand, unmindful of his still dripping-wet index finger.

"Damnit!" the Texan was saying. "I knew I could count on you! I knew it when I spotted you first off. I kin judge character from a mile away, an I said to m'self, There's a man with the guts of J.J. DuBose hisself. But I had t'be sure."

"A trick," was all Landry could say.

"Trick? Why, son, the world's fulla tricks. I strung you along the same as everbody else. The difference was none o'the others was up to callin my bluff. You called it. An you earned yer ree-ward." He picked up the check from the table and handed it to Landry. "Fer services rendered," he said.

I had no idea how Landry felt, but at that moment I experienced a distinct sense of unreality. The characters and landscape had suddenly taken on the quality of a dream, and it was all I could do to turn to the waiter and say, "I'll take that drink now. A double. Please."

J.J. DuBose had begun to chuckle again, and, as before, his laugh turned into the same wracking cough. He sat back down in his chair and, when the coughing fit finally passed, managed to say, "What'-chall gonna do with that money?"

Landry shook his head. He had a blank expression, as though he still could not believe what had happened, as though the test of courage DuBose had spoken of still lay before him.

"I don't know," he said. "There are a lot of things I could do, but I don't know . . ."

His voice trailed off. Just at that moment my drink was brought in, and I gulped it gratefully.

"Looky here," the Texan was saying. "It's early in the day yet. You boys look like y'could use a meal. Why don't y'all come out t'my spread? It ain't too far from here. I got a good Filipino cook 'll make you the best dang lunch y'ever had. Dinner, too, if y'like. How's about it?"

I had not eaten in half a day, but there was something about the terrible eagerness the Texan had exhibited that prompted me to decline.

"I don't think so. We should be pushing on. We've got to get back to California."

"What's yer hurry?" DuBose said, but he had turned his attentions once more to Landry. "What d'yuh say?"

To my surprise Landry looked up at me. His wide-open eyes were eloquent. "Why not?" he said.

I felt a sudden twinge of alarm, the first sign of a creeping panic caused by an inchoate fear that the danger was not yet past — that we had, in fact, only skirted its perimeters.

IN THE END WE WENT. LANDRY WAS KEEN ON VISITING DuBose's "spread," and the Texan had promised to show us over the grounds. I can explain my grudging acquiescence to the idea of going only by saying that, since I realized DuBose was one of the filthy rich oil millionaires of storied legend, and thus wielded such power, it would be foolish to resist. Plainly, his influence was pervasive throughout the county, and probably throughout the state, so anything I feared from him could come about just as easily here in the restaurant as on his estate.

We left the restaurant and headed towards the parking lot. The only car there was a Cadillac, a garish red in color. A stony-faced uniformed chauffeur sat behind the wheel. J.J. DuBose opened the door for us, and Landry got in first, then DuBose, so he was sitting between us. As I was getting in I noticed an enormous ornament on the hood, a praying angel that looked to have been forged from solid gold. I meant to ask DuBose about it, but never got the chance: I was struck speechless the moment I entered the car. It had a portable bar, a stereo, intercom, and telephone, and, my God, it was the biggest car I'd ever seen in my life.

DuBose never stopped talking once during our drive, which lasted over an hour. He moved from one subject to another with incomparable ease, from his cancer to his wildly successful career as an oil baron to his trips to Europe to his love of airplanes (particularly those of pre-World War II vintage) to his love for his departed wife and his estrangement from his ne'er-do-well son.

BY THE TIME THE CADILLAC TURNED INTO A GLEAMING metal gate with the single metallic letter *D* set into the intricate grillwork design high above, a roadway that might have led all the way to California stretched out before us, and I was more nervous than ever.

The driveway was exactly like the ideal of Landry's dreams: a seemingly endless expanse of crushed stone and granite that eventually gave onto macadamized roadway. By then we were within sight of the estate itself, although "estate" does not begin to suggest the size and palatial splendor of it; nor does "palace," with its vaguely European connotations of elegance and design. This mansion was thoroughly American in flavor and architecture; with its gabled front and tall stone columns, it suggested nothing so much as a monument, rather like the Lincoln Memorial. The only difference was this memorial was dedicated to a living man. I was reminded of Coleridge's lines:

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree.*

The Cadillac braked to a halt, and immediately there was a uniformed man opening the door on Landry's side to let us out. DuBose continued his running description of the house and grounds without faltering or stopping for breath one single time.

"This here cost me six million to build in 19 an 56. That was a time when six million went considerable further than it does today, m'friend. Ah've had offers t'sell over the years, mostly from Texas oilmen like m'self, an ah've never considered em for more'n a second. No, thank y'all very much, I say, cause there's s'much of my life wrapped up here. Where would I go if I was t'leave? Move into an apartment in Dallas? No, thank y'suh, I always say . . ."

He led us into the house, the uniformed servant slamming shut the door of the Cadillac after us. A second later, the chauffeur shot off down the road, presumably in the direction of the garage, which, for all I knew, might have been located in a neighboring state.

Once we were inside the house the contrast was startling. DuBose stopped speaking at once. His voice, along with the plaintive warbling of a mockingbird somewhere in the dying afternoon sun, had provided a cacaphony of sounds peculiarly Texan. Now all was silence, and it seemed to dwarf everything else, even J.J. DuBose himself.

Our footsteps echoed throughout the cavernous interior of what I assumed was the foyer as we paced across the marble floor just behind the rangy Texan. DuBose approached one particular door from among

a half dozen, and swung it wide for us to enter after him.

WE WERE IN WHAT LOOKED LIKE A LIBRARY. EVERY WALL but one seemed to be packed solid with books. In the center of the one bare wall was a long, polished mantel. Hung with great care on the dark oak wainscoting above the mantel were framed portraits under glass showing a younger but still recognizable J.J. DuBose, here with his arm around a smiling Ernest Hemingway in safari garb, here shaking hands with Joe Louis, both the boxer and the oil millionaire offering toothy smiles to the cameraman, and here kneeling beside Robert Ruark, in the twilight of his life, in the middle of what looked like an African veldt.

It is always a shock to see someone of your acquaintance in the company of the powerful or famous; in a sense it legitimizes them, and so it was with J.J. DuBose, though I still had my doubts. Perhaps it was to assuage them that DuBose had brought us here.

"This yer's m'den," he said, indicating the room with a sweep of his enormous arm. I took in certain of the details: a gigantic writing desk, made of mahogany, complete with Rolodex, blotter, telephone, in/out tray, and an overstuffed, oversized easy chair. Everything is bigger in Texas.

"You boys hungry yet?" DuBose asked. "I'm starvin, m'self. You go on ahead. Ah gotta make a phone call."

We made our way out of the den with little difficulty, only to find ourselves in a corridor.

IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'D BEEN ALONE WITH LANDRY SINCE meeting the Texan. I took hold of his arm. He turned around to face me. "We're in a very dangerous situation," I said.

Landry stared at me in disbelief. "Dangerous? What the hell are you talking about? I have a check for ten thousand dollars in my pocket, and we're having dinner with probably the wealthiest man in this whole state. Dangerous . . . I don't know what you're talking about."

He turned to go. I tightened my grip on his arm. "Steve," I said. "We're dealing with a crazy man. There's no telling what he has in mind. Let's get out of here."

Landry stared hard at me. His eyes held a gleam I had never seen there before. "Let go of my arm," he said coldly.

At that moment a small, dark-skinned man in a spotless white uniform appeared from a door at the end of the corridor and spoke to us in what was apparently English underneath an indecipherable accent. Then he waved his arm, indicating we should follow.

I let go of Landry's arm. He turned his back on me and headed toward the door. After he disappeared inside the little man remained, waiting. Reluctantly, I followed.

J.J. DuBose joined us at the dinner table. After 15 minutes of small talk, to which I made only a minimal contribution (but in which Landry engaged readily, asking DuBose question after question regarding his wealth, holdings, and property), the Filipino cook returned, bearing a dinner tray, and began to lay out the courses one by one.

It must have been about then that I happened to look down at the places set for us, and gasped.

I had not noticed them before, but the eating utensils — fork, knife, spoon, and soup spoon — were fashioned of solid gold.

"They say y'can't eat money, but dint say nothin' bout eatin' *with* it," DuBose said. I looked up, startled at having heard my thoughts spoken aloud, and found the Texan seated across the table from me, doing his best to enact the role of the kindly benefactor, who, for all his wealth, was still just a touch provincial.

"You boys are gonna get a meal you won't be forgettin'," he said.

He was not exaggerating. We started off with *Escargots de Bourgogne*, proceeded to *L'Oignon Gratinee*, and were then served *Veal Maison*, with a bottle of Mouton-Routhschild to top it off. Whatever else he might have been, J.J. DuBose was not provincial in his tastes in food.

THE DINNER CONVERSATION WAS BASICALLY A MONOLOGUE delivered by DuBose, broken up by occasional questions from Landry, who seemed intent on gleaning every possible bit of information from The Great Man himself. When we had at last consumed every bit of the food on our plates, and refused the Filipino's offers of more, I excused myself and went in search of a restroom. It proved difficult to locate, and once I stumbled into a pantry and once into DuBose's den, but when I found the correct room I stopped in my tracks and looked it over from one end to the other.

The spigots on the sink and in the sunken bathtub were fashioned from solid gold, as was the flush device on the toilet. All the rest was china, and the marbled floor and walls gleamed from having been recently scrubbed. I do not think there was a single speck of dirt anywhere in that room. The ancient cliché "the floor was clean enough

to eat off of" found a curiously truthful approximation here.

By the time I returned to the dining hall our host had served brandy, and both he and Landry were drawing on two Partagas Visible Immensas fully nine inches in length. I declined his offer of one, but accepted a glass of brandy. The conversation had evolved once again while I had been out of the room, and the turn it had taken frightened me.

"So you claim no one would have the nerve to do it?" Landry was saying.

J.J. DuBose shook his head. "It's not just a question of nerve, it's a question of acceptin what would, from that day on, be an un-acceptable handicap t'some folks, somethin a fella'd have t'live with the rest o'his days. This isn't quite the same thing as that little test I give you back at Albert's. Ah wouldn't be fakin this time, cause there's no way in hail ah *could* be. You'd know there wasn't but one way the thing'd turn out. An, like a magician, ah nevah do the same trick twice."

"And how much would you be willing to pay?" asked Landry.

DuBose drew on his cigar and considered the question a moment before answering.

"Why, a man'd be willin t'do that, why, that man'd be worth a half a million dollars, ah reckon."

The gleam in Landry's eyes turned my stomach. "You'd pay half a million dollars?"

The Texan nodded. "Ah would. The money means nothin t'me anymore — they's no way ah'd ever get aroun t'spendin it. But ah'd be satisfied knowin it was bein spent by a man with the balls t'do somethin like that."

"Like what?" I asked. I noticed my voice trembled.

Neither man took any notice of my question. Their eyes were locked, and remained that way even after J.J. DuBose rose to his feet.

"Doc Jenkins'll be here in just a bit. You'll be OK afterwards — he'll see t'it." He took a last puff off his cigar, then crushed it out in an ashtray. "We may as well git the show on the road," he said, and turned and headed toward the door.

Landry was already out of his chair and following DuBose. I stopped him and said, "What the hell's the idea?"

"Never mind," Landry said. His eyes remained fixed on DuBose's retreating figure. "Just c'mon along. I'll need a witness."

"A witness to what?"

He didn't reply, but merely followed DuBose out the door that gave on a long corridor. I had no choice but to follow. We traversed the

corridor. At its end was another door. DuBose opened it, and we followed him out.

WE WERE IN AN ENORMOUS ROOM I RECOGNIZED AT ONCE AS an airplane hangar. The air hung heavy with paint fumes and the smell of grease and machine parts, and there were paintcans and crude workbenches and shelves built into the walls on our end. In the center of the hangar, its wings spanning the width of the room itself, was an enormous biplane of vaguely pre-World War II design.

"This here's a Martin T4M-1," DuBose announced. His voice echoed across the walls as he strode off towards the plane. "It was built for the Navy in 19 and 27. It was a torpedo-bomber."

When he reached the plane he pulled himself up and into the cockpit. Thus ensconced, he called out to us, and his voice sounded more terrifying than ever, amplified as it was by the acoustics of the room.

"Here's Doc Jenkins now."

His announcement caused me to turn. Sure enough, a man dressed in sombre dark clothes, carrying a small medical bag, had entered the room through another door, and now stood awaiting DuBose's orders.

"He'll patch y'up when this is over," the Texan said. "Wail, I guess that's enough of the pre-liminaries. You know the arrangements as well as ah do, so what say we just go on ahead?"

"Anytime you're ready," Landry called back.

J.J. DuBose smiled his crooked smile one final time, and then nodded.

One of DuBose's men whom I had not noticed before but who had evidently followed us into the hangar came forward, and, taking hold of one of the great propeller blades with both his hands, turned it as DuBose switched on the plane's engine. It didn't catch the first time, so he was obliged to try again, this time putting the full strength of his broad shoulders into the effort. This time the propeller blades instantly converted to a blur of whirring speed, and the hangar was filled with the deafening roar of their rotation. It blanked out nearly everything else, and became all I could think of. I tried to blank it out of my mind, but when I turned back to face Landry I saw that he was concentrating hard on the plane, and on the propeller in particular.

"Steve! I shouted. "You're not going to —"

Still staring straight ahead, Landry said, "Stand aside."

I moved in front of him, blocking his way. "No. I'm not going to let you do it."

His eyes finally turned to take me in. "Shut up, and stand aside," he said.

"Steve — "

He pushed me, a rough shove, and I fell back a foot or so. I took a step towards him and then noticed two of DuBose's men, big, broad-shouldered Texans, take several purposeful strides in my general direction, and stop. I hesitated, deciding to make one final appear.

"Steve!" I shouted. "For God's sake! Steve!"

He did not turn around. Instead, he took another few steps in the direction of the whirring propeller blades.

TRY AS I MIGHT, I COULD NOT TAKE MY EYES OFF THEM. They were moving so fast they were lost to sight. There was only a vaguely silverish blur that might have had nothing to do with speed or power. It fostered the illusion that there was nothing there at all, no blades, and that if you wanted to you could thrust your hand directly into their path, and nothing would happen because there was nothing there. Nothing that could shred the skin and chop away the bones of your hand, nothing that could turn living tissue and muscle and flesh and bone into a bleeding raw stump in a fraction of a second.

And even as I looked I saw that Landry had raised not one hand but both of them, and was moving towards the whirring blades. He was no more than three feet from them, I should judge. I started forward again, and the second I did DuBose's two men started towards me, their intentions unmistakable. I could not have stopped Landry even if they hadn't been there: he had the look of a zombie in his eyes, the blank stare that betokened mindlessness, or rather, blind devotion to one single idea: that he could stick both his hands into the path of the propeller blades and come away from it a rich man. And high above him, in the cockpit of the biplane, sat J.J. DuBose, his grin a wrinkled river running from ear to ear, watching Landry's progress with frenzied anticipation. He had been right: there was no way he could stop the whirring blades in time. Nothing in the world could stop the fateful encounter at this point.

"Landry!" I shouted at the top of my lungs.

The roar of the propellers drowned out my voice. It hardly mattered; Landry could never have heard me at that point even if absolute silence had prevailed.

SUDDENLY SICKENED BY THE WHOLE SPECTACLE, I TURNED my back on both Landry and the grinning madman in the biplane's cockpit and walked away from both of them. I hurried, nearly running,

to one of the side doors, anxious to get outside the hangar before the inevitable occurred. It seemed to me I had already done enough in the name of friendship for this hotheaded young man who was, after all, an acquaintance and no more, and that it was actually he who had dishonored what friendship existed between us by his blind devotion to money at any cost to his physical well-being.

I was running by the time I reached the door of the hangar, and I did not stop for breath until I had pushed the door open and rushed out, leaving behind me the noise and the tumult and the bloodshed that was about to occur. Careful not to glance back even once, I ran across the grounds of J.J. DuBose's estate until at length I reached the stone and granite roadway. Once there I stopped, gasping for breath, and waited until I had the stamina to proceed, then walked swiftly along the roadway until it gave onto the highway. There I stood by the side of the road, one thumb extended, and tried my best to put all thoughts of that day's events out of my mind forever.

THUS ENDS ONE STORY AND BEGINS ANOTHER, OR SO IT would seem. Actually, the two dovetail with marvelous economy: the man who stopped to give me a ride took me all the way into Oklahoma, and it was through him that I met the girl who was to become my wife. I need not describe our courtship, her family, or the investment business I eventually entered into back in California, so I will skip over those facts and pause only briefly to describe picking up a San Francisco *Chronicle* some months later and being greatly surprised to see J.J. DuBose's face, complete with crooked grin, staring out at me from an inside page above the headline *Texas Oil Millionaire Dies Of Cancer*. I read the three column story underneath, searching in vain for any mention of Steve Landry. Judging from the writeup, DuBose had not exaggerated in describing his wealth and power, nor his illness. According to the obituary, he had no living relatives; apparently his son, living somewhere in the wilds of Mexico, was not to his thinking a proper relative.

THAT WAS NOT QUITE THE END.

I must skip ahead several years to a time when business dictated a trip to Houston on a matter of no importance to this story. While I was staying in a downtown hotel I happened to pick up a telephone book and, more out of boredom and idle curiosity than anything else, looked up Landry's name on the off-chance that he might have remained in Texas after coming into the money I had no doubt he collected. To my surprise, there was indeed a listing for Steve Landry, though no

address was given.

I spent perhaps ten minutes struggling with myself over whether to call him. Eventually, the side of me that remembered the good days of traveling with him throughout Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico won out over the side that hastened to remind me of his newly-won wealth and concomitant power and the fact that, whether my act was justified or not, I had left him during a moment of crisis.

I dialed the number listed. A man's voice said, "Mr. Landry's residence. Who's callin, please?"

Somewhat surprised, I repeated my name.

"Mr. Landry's right busy now, suh. Would it be all raht if ah have him call yuh at a later time?"

"Yes, of course," I said, and hung up.

I thought that would be the end of it. How wrong I was. Not 20 minutes later the telephone in my room rang. I lifted the receiver, and heard Landry's voice for the first time in nearly five years. There was not a trace of anger or malice or resentment in it; it sounded exactly the way I remembered it when we were both wayfarers with only a few dollars in our collective pockets and the prospects for a successful career for either of us were bleak indeed. The only difference was that this Landry seemed interested only in talking of investments, and mainly in companies I was unfamiliar with, at that.

"Listen," Landry said at length, "I've got to see you. I'll send a car out to pick you up. We'll have dinner together. What hotel are you at?"

I did not attempt to remonstrate. Landry would have his way, as always, and, besides that, I was actually anxious to see and talk with him again. It had been a very long time. We agreed on seven o'clock as the pickup time, since dinner would be served at eight-thirty. I hung the phone up and sat back to wait.

On the dot of seven o'clock my telephone rang. It was the front desk, informing me the car had arrived. I had showered, shaved, and put on a fresh suit in the meantime. Once downstairs in the hotel foyer, I nodded to the uniformed chauffeur who stood waiting. He offered me a distinctively Texan grin and beckoned to me to follow him to a Rolls-Royce parked in front of the hotel. For some reason, he looked vaguely familiar.

"Mr. Landry certainly lives very well," I commented, getting in.

"Yes, sir," the chauffeur said. "He does it up just fine."

It was not until we were driving along that I recognized the chauffeur: he was the same man that had driven us to J.J. DuBose's estate five years before. Landry had hired him for himself.

We had been en route nearly 20 minutes before I began to recognize the landscape flashing by the windows, and for the first time since we had set out on our journey, I spoke to the chauffeur.

"Does Mr. Landry live on Mr. DuBose's estate?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," the chauffeur said. "He dint want to change nothin, s'he lives there by hisself."

I sat back and reflected on the fortune my friend had — must have — compiled. While I had been fortunate to earn twenty thousand dollars a year, Landry had most probably taken the \$500,000 he had gotten from DuBose (I hesitate to say earned) and invested wisely. He might be a multimillionaire by now, I thought, not at all different in standing and influence than DuBose had been — a filthy rich Texas millionaire in spite of himself. On coincidences of lesser fiber have stranger paradoxes been built.

A SENSE OF UNEASE CAME OVER ME AS WE PASSED THROUGH the gate that still bore the single gold initial *D*. I cannot say why, except that it might have been the psychic residue of J.J. DuBose himself. Although long dead and buried, he still seemed to cast a shadow over all — a shadow without limits.

The car braked to a halt, and a uniformed doorman came down the front steps and opened the door for me. I followed him inside the house while the Rolls-Royce drove off.

Once we were inside DuBose's presence seemed stronger than ever. My nerves were on edge, and I noticed my teeth were grating — imagine that, actually grating — against each other. I felt very much like getting the meeting and the dinner over with and getting out of the house, off the estate, and back to my hotel.

"This way," the doorman said, and led me past the marble foyer that was just as large and gleamed just as luxuriously as it had in my mind's eye, toward a closed door. Before this he stopped.

"Mr. Landry is just beyond there, sir," he said.

To my surprise, he turned his back on me and began walking away along the marble floor, his footsteps clacking and echoing hollowly throughout the vast foyer.

My apprehension was at its height. I did not dare enter the room. Instead, I raised my fist and rapped softly. "Landry?" I said.

His voice came back to me, through the mahogany woodwork: "Come on in."

All my fears fell away, and I turned the knob and walked into the room, then stopped dead.

There, lying atop a gold cushion, surrounded by black satin sheets

that completely covered what might have been a desk, or else simply a table or stand designed for someone of his size and weight, was Landry: a single, movable trunk no more than two and a half feet long from the head to the abrupt cessation at the waist. The ears had been cropped away, so there were only openings on either side of the head, the eyes were slits that glowered sightlessly, and the trunk was dressed in a coat of gold lame.

"So," Landry said, edging a cigarette out of an open pack lying before him with his teeth, and then likewise scratching a match and applying it to the cigarette until its end glowed redly, and then transferring the lighted cigarette to his mouth, "You follow the stocks, don't you? Ought to keep your eye on C and B. That's a growth industry." ●

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It was all make-believe — until Death wrote the script!

The Playhouse Murder

by HAL CHARLES

ELAINE WAS NERVOUS AND BOUND TO MAKE A MISTAKE, BUT I forced myself to stay seated and watch the scene develop.

"Oh, Father, Christina is dead before my very eyes."

"Hush, Beatrice," said the bearded man. "It is the way of nature. The weak are preyed upon by the strong."

"But Christina was my favorite dove."

At that moment a tall man wearing a cape appeared behind them. Perched on his shoulder was a huge hooded hawk.

She turned toward him suddenly. "Who are . . ."

"No, no, no," screamed a voice from the darkness. "How many times do I have to tell you that your turn comes after the Duke speaks, not before." A small figure in cut-off jeans and a t-shirt bounded onto the stage.

"I'm sorry," Elaine said.

"Sorry, sorry, sorry," mimicked the director. "All I've heard from you this last week of rehearsal is how sorry you are. This isn't the senior play, missy! This show goes on in two nights, and I'm not going to let your missed cues and dropped lines embarrass me."

Elaine began to cry. When I could see her tears were real, I couldn't hold back any longer. "Wait a minute," I shouted, "you can't talk to her like that."

The director glared up at me as I marched down an aisle. "And who

may I ask is this, the local drama critic?"

"I'm Elaine's father and . . ."

"Oh, Daddy," she said with unmistakable disgust, "you don't understand. Mr. Fields is right. I do keep messing up."

"Ah, our backwoods constable," said the director on seeing my badge. "If you're out to arrest somebody, I assure you the only crime here is your daughter's acting." He turned to the rest of the cast. "My leading lady is felled by an emergency appendectomy, and I'm stuck with a no-talent local."

I was about to demonstrate the long arm of the law was more than a cliché when the caped figure with the hawk interrupted.

"Gentlemen, enough of this bickering. Larry, if you'd spend more time directing our last-minute fill-in and less on your daily constitutional around the countryside, we'd be better off. I've learned to adjust to the obvious shortcomings of this production." He looked condescendingly at the cast and crew. "I should think you could do as much. Now, if you're through wasting my time . . ."

Roger Manchester seemed so different from the actor I had seen so many times in the movies. He had been up there for years with Gable, Flynn, and Cooper. When a new generation of leading men had come along, though, he showed up in more mature roles, on TV guest spots, and in the papers — always with a young starlet at some Hollywood party. He had always played the humble good guy, but in person he seemed the opposite. How had Seth Fuller, the owner of the playhouse, gotten an actor of Manchester's stature to come to Clement County, Kentucky?

I apologized to Fields and the rest of the cast, then got in my car and headed for the office. I had made a mistake, but with Elaine I was used to that. Since her mother had died a few years ago, raising Elaine had become solely my responsibility, and I was usually a little overprotective. I had always been able to keep my temper in check, except when it came to my daughter.

THINGS AT THE OFFICE WERE SLOWER THAN A CHECKERS game on the courthouse steps. Sarah Fricker registered what had become a daily complaint — someone was peeping through her bedroom window. Given Sarah's spinster looks, I could never figure out whether she was complaining or bragging. Then Mrs. Hanks over at the library stormed in during her lunch hour to tell me that another book on the Citizens United against Trash's so-called "hit list" had disappeared. Over the last few months the Reverend Harlan Spiker and CUT had stirred up more trouble with their campaign than a

hungry bear in a hornet's nest. Later that afternoon Clem Riddle had me come out to his farm. Seems those no-count Bowser boys had been fooling around his cornfield. I'd watched Tod and Rod climb up the ladder from tying tin cans on alley-cat tails to hot-wiring cars. Who knows what they were up to this time? I'm not complaining, mind you. This town's been like a family to me, helping me raise Elaine. I've never once regretted coming back to Woodhole after college and making my life here.

I found nothing at Clem's. When I got back a little after dark Elaine still hadn't returned from the playhouse, so I pulled some chicken and potato salad from the fridge and popped a beer open: Bench had just ended the Reds' seventh with a liner to short when I heard a car.

A minute later Elaine came into the kitchen followed by a tall man of about thirty wearing khaki pants and a blue shirt. Real Ivy League. She introduced him as Philip Reede, the man who had written the play she'd been so excited about since getting the part.

"Did you know, Daddy, that Philip, Mr. Reede, won a Tony last year for his very first play and *The New York Times* said he was 'the prime candidate to become the next Eugene O'Neil.' "

"Some overnight success," said Reede, accepting a can of beer. "The only reason they thought it was my first play was that nobody would read the ten I had written earlier."

He filled the air with a hearty laugh.

"What brings a successful writer like you out to Clement County?" I asked.

"Seth Fuller did me a favor a few years back, and I owed him one. Besides, I wanted to try out *Death of the Duchess* on ordinary folks before opening it to the self-proclaimed sophisticated New York audience."

"Elaine hasn't told me much," I said. "What's the play about?"

"Have you ever read Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess'?" he asked.

"Back in college, I think, but I don't remember much about it."

"Basically it's about a Renaissance duke named Ferrara who has just lost his wife and is negotiating to secure his next duchess. The poem's a psychological study of Ferrara. You see, for over a century since the poem was published, one question has troubled readers: what happened to the Duke's last duchess?"

"And you play is going to tell us." I popped open another beer. "Listen, I appreciate your bringing Elaine home. Even though Woodhole's no New York City, I still don't like my daughter out there alone."

"They're not too far apart," said Reede. "I saw two creeps in a blue pickup out at the playhouse tonight who look like they just crawled out from under a 42nd St. rock."

Changing the subject, I took Elaine's hand. "I'm sorry about this afternoon, sweetheart. It's just that . . ."

"It's OK, Daddy. There's been a lot of tension on the set anyway. Usually theatre people are like a family, but they've been fighting worse than cats or dogs."

"Even Roger Manchester?" I asked.

"Yes," answered Elaine. "He's always chewing out someone for stepping on his lines or trying to upstage him. And most of the cast hates Mr. Fields because he treats them like a bunch of incompetent amateurs."

Reede put down his empty can. "That's what you get when you put a lot of egotistical people together on a closed set."

We sat there talking for quite awhile, but when Reede left a little before midnight I had the feeling I didn't know much about him. It was like watching an actor play a part and wondering about the actor's real-life identity.

I SPENT A RESTLESS NIGHT. LATELY, IT SEEMED THAT ELAINE and I were drawing apart, and I wasn't sure why. About 1:00 a summer storm rolled in from the northwest. As the rain pelted the roof, I thought I heard noises in our two-story frame house. By the time I woke up, though, the storm was gone.

I was fixing coffee when Elaine came in and asked me to give her a ride out to the playhouse. Fields was supposed to pick her up early that morning, but hadn't shown. She figured he had gotten involved with preparing for their last runthrough and had forgotten.

Seth Fuller had built his playhouse and the guest cottages on the site of his family farm. The war over, Seth had lit out for Hollywood to follow his dream. But, after a few years of waiting on tables and to be discovered, he had packed it in when his parents died leaving him the farm. He sold off most of the acreage and built the little resort. Since then, he'd struggled to make it go summer after summer.

When we drove into the compound, the large converted barn stood like a mother hen amidst the brood of small cottages that in a few days would start to fill up with tourists. Just beneath the playhouse sign, which was in need of paint, was the barrel-chested figure of Seth Fuller standing toe to toe with Mrs. Hanks' nemesis. Dressed in his usual wardrobe of a black frock coat that looked two centuries old and a broad-brimmed hat, the Reverend Spiker was waving his hands in the

dramatic fashion that had brought him from an unknown country preacher to the darling of the Lexington-Louisville media.

I let Elaine out and ambled up within listening distance just to make sure nothing happened. But their quarrel broke up. The Reverend Spiker passed me, pausing only to say, "The hand of righteousness will smite this den of iniquity. Mark my words."

I continued over to the red-faced owner, half expecting to smell fire and brimstone.

"You've got to do something, Sheriff," bellowed Seth like a wounded bull. "That man's a fanatic. The more power he gets, the more he wants. He says that if I don't shut down this 'place of the Devil,' he's going to picket it with that group of his, CAT or CUT or whatever the hell he calls it."

"Easy, Seth." I put my hand on his shoulder. Everybody in Clement County knew what a quick temper Seth had.

"Damn it! If that power-crazed preacher surrounds this playhouse with those idiots of his shouting and carrying signs and pointing fingers, nobody's going to come to the play, Roger Manchester or not. I want this play to be a blockbuster."

"Daddy, Daddy, come quick!" It was Elaine screaming.

I started running in the direction of her voice. As I rounded the playhouse, I saw my daughter standing in the doorway of Cottage C.

"What's the matter?" I said.

Elaine just pointed past the open door. Walking through a sweet, incense-like odor, I found sprawled on the hardwood floor Larry Fields. His head was grotesquely twisted to the side and his hair was matted with blood. He looked worse than Herky Sutton the time his block-and-tackle slipped while he was loading hay bales.

I knelt down over the body. Somebody had obviously caved in the back of Fields' skull. But with what? I glanced around the room. All the windows were locked. It was sparsely furnished with a bed, dresser, couch, chair, table, and a few lamps, all of which looked like they'd been found at a yard sale. A fireplace and woodbox covered one wall. Nothing looked out of place or broken. There hadn't been a struggle. On top of the dresser I spotted a wallet and some jewelled rings. I pried open the wallet with my pen to find a couple of hundred dollars and Fields' I.D.

I went back to the body. It was lying in front of the couch that had been set in the middle of the room. The light beside it was still burning. On the drab couch were a pen, a stopwatch, and a green-covered script *Death of the Duchess*.

I CALLED THE STATE POLICE BARRACKS AND THE COUNTY coroner. While I waited for the Mobile Crime Laboratory and Doc Sloane to arrive, I had another look around. I wanted to search a brown suitcase I found under the bed, but as I had discovered to my embarrassment in the Rhodes robbery case a few years ago, it was "hands-off" until the lab boys were through. I moved on. The fireplace hadn't been used in a year. I glanced into the woodbox. Beneath the kindling gleamed something golden. I hadn't played pick-up sticks in years, but I managed to lift off some wood to reveal a small metallic statue. Smears across the base were smudges of red.

I kept everyone out of the cottage till the lab boys arrived. I pointed out such things as the hidden statue to them, then stayed out of their way while they went through their routine. Doc Sloane finally showed to take control of the body and promised me the autopsy report as soon as possible, which would be the next day unless he found an unemptied scotch bottle.

I couldn't help but notice the atmosphere was one of relief, not grief, when I assembled the cast and crew. I questioned everyone there, though no one had much to offer me. Seth said that when he went to bed shortly after midnight the light was still on in Fields' cottage, but then, he noted, the director stayed up late every night. Reede, who was staying in Cottage B, said he had last seen Fields around 8:00. When Reede had gotten back from my house, he had noticed Fields' light, but had gone straight to bed. I had to wake Roger Manchester in Cottage A. Having taken a sleeping pill because of a nerve-racking day, he had gone to bed around sundown, and no, he hadn't heard a thing during the night. Seth introduced me to the rest of the play's cast and crew when they arrived during the commotion. They were staying at Emma Sowders' Boarding House in town, and, having gotten into an all-night poker game, they could vouch for one another.

Then I had time for Elaine. She still seemed shaken up about the whole thing. I was glad when Reede brought some coffee and started to talk to her. It settled her down, and I didn't feel so bad about going to the office.

Technically this was my case, but in reality the State Police would handle most of the investigation. When they'd digested all the evidence they could get their hands on, they'd throw me a bone and let me make any arrests. They were content to let elected amateurs like me take care of such serious matters as school crossings and picking up the local winos on Saturday night, but real crimes, they loved to remind me, were the province of professionals.

Sometimes I think they're right. My life seemed an endless parade

of traffic citations and pie-judging. Potter was a decent deputy, though he'd been injured in the recent softball game with Barlow County and would be laid up for a couple of weeks. So I had to listen to another of Sarah Pricker's fantasies. Some teenage boy with a red hunting hat facing backwards had stared through her bedroom window. Her call was interrupted by Mrs. Hanks, who told me I just *had* to do something about CUT. One of its memebbers, acting on orders from Reverend Spiker of course, had walked away from the stacks with *Catcher in the Rye*. Since I planned to talk to our famous preacher anyway, I told her I'd go see him right away.

I WAS CRUISING DOWN STATE ROAD 877 TOWARD THE church, which was on the same road as the playhouse, when I passed a familiar blue pickup with a tarp over the bed going in the opposite direction. No telling what Clement County's self-styled version of the Dukes of Hazzard had hidden back there, but even if I had turned around, the Bowser boys'd been long gone.

Set down a piece on a gravel road, Green Pastures Church was a small, concrete-block building. For the last eleven years the Reverend Spiker had been shearing his flock without anyone noticing till he had decided to go big-time last fall. On Halloween he had held a public bookburning. I think there were more of your media types there than participants, and when the smoke cleared, the Reverend's little fire had received statewide attention. So he formed CUT and began using a lot of well-meaning people for his own benefit.

Luckily I caught Harlan in a rare moment when he was off-camera.

"Lo, Sheriff. Been scribbling a few notes for my memoirs." As his five-foot-even frame rose up from his high-backed chair, I could tell he was serious. Up close he looked younger than he had seemed on TV. "What can I do for you? You interested in joining our little group?"

I waved him off. "It's about Larry Fields. He . . ."

"Is a disciple of the Devil. Everyone knows how he directed that blasphemous display of nudity *The Bare Facts*. That kind of trash might be acceptable in one of those big-city Sodom and Gommorahs, but we won't let him bring it into our community."

"He's dead. Someone bashed his head in."

The Reverend hit his roll-top desk sharply. "Did I not say the hand of righteousness would strike down the abomination? We are saved." He bowed his head. "Our people will be spared the spectacle of violence and adultery."

Spiker certainly didn't seem too broken up about things. "How do

you know what this play is about?"

"What else would such a pervert bring to the stage?"

I let his logic pass. "You were at Seth's this morning. Did you notice anything out of the ordinary?"

"None were about when I arrived. The rain had just stopped. I banged on the blasphemer's door, but he didn't answer. Then I went over to Seth Fuller's office and demanded to be heard. As you saw, he wouldn't listen to me. Now is there anything else?"

"Yes, a warning. If your flock wants to burn their own books, there's nothing I can do, but stay away from the public library!"

"Sheriff, I assure you none of my people has even entered that repository of evil."

Knowing some of the illiterate members of CUT, I found that easy to believe.

BY MID-AFTERNOON THINGS HAD SLOWED DOWN TO NARY A jaywalker in sight, so I decided to head back to Seth's. When I got there, Seth wasn't around and no one knew where he was. I called his name a few times, and he finally emerged from the dilapidated barn behind the playhouse.

"Been thinking about tearing this old shed down, Sheriff. You know how barnwood fetches a high price with those fancy interior decorators." He wiped his hands on his overalls. "Anything new on the murder?"

"Not really."

"Guess you won't know much till you hear from the State Police," he commented, lighting up a cigar.

"Seth, just between us, I've always felt you get to the truth fastest not with microscopes and test tubes, but by knowing the people involved. So what can you tell me about Fields and the rest of those theatre people?"

"Truthfully, I don't know much about any of them. Reede and Fields got in touch with me last spring about this hot property they had, *Death of the Duchess*. They suggested that Roger Manchester would be perfect for the lead and that he was available since his last play had bombed in New Haven. Reede knew that Roger and I had been contract players at Warner Brothers in the 50's and figured I could persuade an old friend to take the part."

"So you put it together."

"Why not? Reede's hot; Roger's still a draw with the tourist crowd, Fields was OK, and I want the playhouse to have a reputation for putting on the best in new theatre. All in all it was a helluva oppor-

tunity. I'm lucky Reede's agreed to take over as director so we can open tomorrow night."

"Elaine sure got a break — working with blue-ribbon talent in her first professional show."

"Phillip Reede seems to think she's pretty blue-ribbon, if you know what I mean," he winked.

My blood rushed a little faster. "I'm not sure what I do."

"No offense. It's just that everybody knew Reede had a heavy romance with Samantha Giles, who was to be the leading lady. Well, it seems Elaine took her place in more ways than one."

I calmed myself down, then, after thanking Seth, drove home, all the while fighting what I knew was true — my little girl was becoming a woman.

The house seemed larger, more empty. Nine years ago I'd lost Jenny, and now it wouldn't be long before Elaine would be leaving. I found myself wandering up the stairs to her room. In the corner was the Victorian dollhouse I'd built to ease her through the summer of her broken leg. And over her desk was a picture of us hiking together in the Smokies. As I was hanging her faded jeans on the opened closet door, I noticed a pair of mud-caked loafers. Last night had been the only time in the last two weeks it had rained. I fought back the policeman in me.

A car pulled into the driveway, then out again. The front door slammed. "Daddy, I'm home."

"Up here, Elaine."

The wide smile on her face disappeared the moment she saw the shoes in my hand.

"What are you doing in my room?" she said sharply. Don't I have any privacy?"

"Honey, I didn't mean . . . I wasn't spying . . . you see . . ." My stomach did a back flip, then I blurted out, "Where did you go late last night?"

Elaine's face flushed. "Not that it's any of your business, but I couldn't sleep, so I went for a walk."

"In the rain?"

"Yes. And now will you leave me alone?" She jerked the shoes from my hand.

Reluctantly I left. I didn't feel much like eating, so I climbed in the cruiser and drove around for awhile. I wasn't sure what was bothering me most — the case or my relationship with Elaine.

THE PHONE JANGLED ME OUT OF A RESTLESS SLEEP EARLY the next morning. Clem Riddle was fuming. The Bowser boys had cut

through his property again. I had planned to speak to Elaine at breakfast, but that would have to wait.

Summer fog still hung over the blacktop as I sped down the familiar stretch of 877. Just past the playhouse, I turned into Clem's. His hands covered with grease, the farmer climbed down from his John Deere. "Them two been racin' up and down the road out to my cornfield all spring. It's disturbin' the missus and we got lotsa livestock. Can't afford to have those goomers go and kill off a cow. They're back there now, and sure as shootin' they're up to no good."

The cornfield road was still damp, so their tire tracks were easy to follow. After a mile or so, I reached the fence Clem had built years ago when he bought the land from Seth. Two rails were removed, and sitting on the edge of the adjacent cornfield was an empty blue pickup. Tod and Rod were probably out in the field somewhere poaching deer, squirrel, or the like.

I hid the cruiser behind some bushes and slipped under the tarp in the truck. It was a whole lot easier for those good ole boys to come to me than vice-versa. I squinted at me watch. Right about now, if I didn't miss my guess, Reede would be picking up Elaine to go to the playhouse. I was wondering what kind of danger she might be in when an even scarier thought crossed my mind. Usually I played by the State Police rules and kept my nose out of their investigations, but this was different. One way or another Elaine was involved, and I was determined to find out how — even if it hurt.

I tried piecing together Fields, Reede, Manchester and the playhouse. Two things I was sure of in Fields' death: robbery hadn't been the motive and he had been killed by somebody he knew. Then I heard a cornstalk crackle and a guttural laugh.

"Sure as hell the easiest money we ever made," came the unmistakable whine of Tod Bowser.

"Yeah, just like he promised," grunted Tod's older brother. "You know what we gonna be?"

The tarp flew back.

"You gonna be guests of the county," I responded, pointing my .38 at them. Staring at the long green-stemmed plants they had slung over their shoulders, I knew why they had been making repeated trips through Clem's property. The Treasury Department bulletins warned that this kind of thing had been going on all over the state. They had estimated that tobacco was the only cash crop in Kentucky that brought in more money than marijuana, and it was simple. After all, people had grown it for hemp during World War II, and since then the stuff had sprung up wild everywhere.

But not this thick. Standing on top of the cab, I gazed across the field. My enterprising friends were growing pot between the rows of corn. If the federal boys were right, I was staring at upwards of a million dollars. The whole ride back to town my prisoners were quiet. But I was sure of one thing — somebody, the *he* Rod mentioned, had to be behind the operation since Tod and Rod had trouble chewing gum and walking at the same time.

AFTER BOOKING THE TONGUE-TIED BROTHERS, I CALLED Doc Sloane. Though he was busy setting a cat's leg, he took time to confirm that the cause of Fields' death was a blow to the head by a blunt instrument (like Rod or Tod's brain?). The time of death was somewhere between midnight and three. My guess was that since the storm hadn't started till a little after 1:00 and since there was no trace of mud in the cottage, the murder had taken place between 12:00 and 1:00.

I dialed the State Police to let them in on my deductions. I was politely thanked by the young lieutenant assigned to the case, who in turn informed me they hadn't scratched up clue one. There had been some *sinsemilla*, a seedless variety of marijuana, on the body, he said, but then what would you expect from some actor who'd just come down from the drug capital of the world. I didn't bother to make the distinction between actor and director for him; he didn't seem like your basic culture-lover.

An ugly picture was starting to form, and it wasn't just my doodling. The cornfield that was more than a cornfield . . . Reede's seeing their truck at the playhouse . . . the dope on Fields' body. The Bowser boys weren't breaking windows this time.

"Well, I should have known you'd be lollygagging round your office instead of keeping the perverts away from innocent citizens," interrupted a voice.

Perched in the doorframe was a spindly, red-haired woman in her forties. Her face the same color as her hair, she gestured frantically, her arms flailing away like an ostrich trying to fly.

"What can I do for you, Sarah?"

"That's Miss Fricker to you, Sheriff." She clunked down her purse.

"He was there again last night."

"Who?"

"The pervert, of course. Who else would dress up in tights and carry a sword?"

I picked up her purse heavy with books and handed it to her. "I assure you, Miss Fricker, if there's a man running around in under-

wear toting a sword, I'll catch him."

I was going back to their cell to pick the Bowsers' brains before they picked the cell lock when the phone rang. It was Seth.

"You gotta get out here quick. The tourists are starting to arrive, and you know who's here to greet them? That damned preacher and his bunch of fanatics. If you don't do something, I got me a twelve gauge that will."

THINGS AT THE PLAYHOUSE REMINDED ME OF A HUMAN demolition derby. Led by Reverend Spiker, clad in black as ever, a dozen of the county's citizens bearing signs like KEEP OUR COUNTRY CLEAN and ENTERTAINMENT YES — TRASH NO paraded in front of the theatre entrance. Several cars with out-of-state license plates had been stopped. Some early-arriving tourists snapped pictures of the local color while others pushed through the sign-bearers shouting about their rights.

All of a sudden a rotund woman dressed in a white blouse and skirt rushed into the circle of protesters. Raising an umbrella she attacked the Reverend, who parried her blows with a sign labelled DOWN WITH VIOLENCE. "How dare you, you self-righteous censors," berated a fuming Mrs. Hanks. "Stealing *Catcher in the Rye* and *From Here to Eternity* was bad enough, but when you take the Bard's masterpiece, that's too much."

Dodging Mrs. Hanks' blows, I had a sudden inspiration. I pulled her back. "Take it easy now. I know who's been stealing from your library, and it's not these people. If you'll just go back to your desk, I'll have your books returned, even *Hamlet*."

Shocked that I had figured out the latest book to be stolen before she had complained, Mrs. Hanks began to back away. Then, without warning the afternoon air was split by a shotgun blast. At the edge of the circle stood Seth Fuller holding a mean-looking double-barrel.

"When I told you people to get out of here, I meant it," he snarled.

"The people," returned Reverend Spiker, "have the right to assemble."

I stepped forward, pushing Seth's weapon toward the ground. "But not on private property." I turned to Seth. "They're leaving. Now let me have the gun."

Spiker hesitated for a moment, then looked over Seth's shoulder. A TV truck from Lexington was just setting up. Like a drill sergeant, he marched his group toward the truck, and while the video tape rolled, he began to preach — to the camera.

I walked Seth past the line at the registration desk and into his office.

He pulled out a bottle of Kentucky's finest bourbon, took a swig, and set it down amidst a pile of bills.

"Preciate that, Sheriff. No telling what could have happened. Might even have ruined my sell-out."

"It seems like I'm out here quite a lot lately, but since I am here, let me ask you something. Did Fields' smoke pot?"

"How'd I know? I never saw him with any."

"How about the Bowser boys? Did you ever see Fields around Tod and Rod?"

Seth sat down. "Why do you ask?"

"I arrested those two for growing the stuff this morning."

"You suspect them of supplying Fields?"

"Could be more than that."

Seth stared for a long time into the amber bottle. "Sheriff, something I should have told you before, but frankly I didn't want to hurt the play's chances. On the night of the murder, I got tired of writing checks and strolled onto the front porch. It was just before the storm hit. What do I see but Roger Manchester, my star, coming out of Fields' cottage, steamed."

That threw me for a loop. I knew Manchester and Fields didn't get along, but Roger Manchester a murderer? That was like John Wayne fighting World War II for the Nazis. Then again, maybe I'd been so hepped up on the Bowsers I hadn't examined all the angles.

I THANKED SETH AND WALKED OVER TO COTTAGE A. Manchester was sitting on the porch like a king on his throne. Between anecdotes he was grinning for the tourists' camera and signing autographs. The attention seemed to nourish the actor the way a wilted plant comes to life after a summer shower.

"Where would you like your autograph, Sheriff?" he said.

"Could we speak in private, Mr. Manchester?"

"Why not?" He released the hand of a young blond sitting beside him. "If you good people will please excuse me, I have to give a command performance for the law."

As soon as we were inside, I said, "This is pretty serious. Yesterday you told me that on the night of Fields' murder you went to bed early. Today, though, I uncovered a witness who saw you come out of Fields' cabin at approximately the time of his death."

The glow faded and his head drooped. Manchester turned his back to me and faced the barren fireplace. Finally he spoke. "Sheriff, do you know what it's like to be Hollywood's leading man, to be mobbed wherever you go by adoring fans, to have anything or anybody you

want? Then, you wake up one day and it's gone. The big parts aren't there and neither are the fans. Your life becomes an endless stream of supporting roles to a lot of no-talent pretty-faces in B-movies and guest appearances on late-night television — just because your face shows a few wrinkles and your hair betrays a little grey."

I wasn't sure what he was getting at.

"I need this play. If it goes to Broadway, it's my chance to get back in the limelight."

"But what about Fields?"

"What can I say about a man who never did anything but a few dirty plays off-Broadway. You know, he even had a replica of a Tony made up and carried it with him everywhere. Well, that nobody was going to ruin it all. I went by his cottage that night merely to discuss some last minute blocking. Out of the blue he told me he was leaving the play — said he'd found a better deal."

"So you . . ."

"Left. Furious. What else could I do? You can't reason with a scoundrel like that."

"Wait a minute! You just left? Can you prove that?"

Manchester paused a minute. "Perhaps. As I was leaving the cottage, I saw Philip Reede pull up. Of course I went to him and told him about Fields' decision. He was even more outraged than I."

With everybody's sudden admissions, I was beginning to feel like the cheated-on husband — the last to know. "Why didn't you mention this to me earlier?"

Sheriff, a man in my position can hardly afford to become involved in such a sordid affair."

"I'm afraid you're already very much involved. Now, can you tell me what Reede did, where he went after you left him?"

"No."

"Where can I find Reede?"

"Where he's been all morning, with your daughter in the playhouse."

As I left Manchester slumped before the fireplace, I had a sad feeling that he wouldn't be signing any more autographs that afternoon.

IT TOOK A MOMENT FOR MY EYES TO GET ACCUSTOMED TO the darkness of the theatre. I could hear muffled voices as I moved toward the dimly-lit stage.

"Phil, you still haven't told me why you changed my last speech?"

"Trust me. Now try the lines again. You cross to Roger, look him

straight in the face, and say . . . ”

Elaine hesitated, then began. “Duke Ferrara, I know my father the Count has promised you my hand, but I will not wed a murderer. You seem surprised that I have learned what happened to your last duchess. You offered her a famous name, riches, a castle. Soon after, you tired of her and cast her aside. In her sorrow she took her own life. Now callously you seek a new bride. Do you truly believe that another young woman by your side can restore your vitality, your youth?”

“Perfect,” Reede said. “You delivered the lines just as we practiced them.”

“But Mr. Fields would never have allowed such a change,” Elaine protested.

“Yes, but he’s no longer the director.”

I cleared my throat. “What I’d like to know, Mr. Reede, is — did you have anything to do with Fields’ sudden decision to pull out of the play — or his death?”

Startled, Elaine and Reede turned toward me. “Daddy!”

“I have a witness,” I continued, “who places you outside Fields’ cottage, in a state of anger, just before his death. And your little scene up there gives me a glimmer of a motive. If I remember that college lit class of mine, Hamlet changed the lines of a play that was to be presented at court in order to get his uncle to confess to murder.” At that moment I was thankful for stolen library books that had jogged my memory. “I’m not sure why *you* wanted the lines of this play changed, but Fields had to be put out of the way for you to do so.”

Reede walked slowly to the front of the stage and stared into the darkness. It was as if for the first time the mask he’d been wearing melted, and I saw the pained face of the real Philip Reede. “Actually, Sheriff, your comparison to Hamlet’s strategy is quite close to the truth. Both of us were using a play for revenge. I think I’ll feel better if I tell the truth. I wrote *Death of the Duchess* for one purpose — to get Roger Manchester. I wanted to shock the great leading man into realizing somebody knew what he had done, and originally Larry had agreed to help.”

“I’m not sure I follow.”

“Larry Fields got lucky on a couple of skin shows, but what he always wanted to do was legitimate theatre. Knowing that, I offered him a chance to direct *Death*, if he’d do it my way. He lept at the opportunity. The other night Manchester told me Larry was pulling out before the premier, something about a big deal.”

Elaine trod downstage. “Phil, why did you use me like this? What do you have against Roger?”

"Roger Manchester is a murderer. To his fans those young girls he surrounds himself with are just pictures. For me, one of those girls was something more. Like Duke Ferrara, Manchester promised her the world. Then, when he was through with her, he tossed her out like yesterday's newspaper. He didn't care that she was in love with him. Three weeks after their breakup, Sylvia put a bullet in her head, and I lost a sister. My so-called friends tried to tell me that Sylvia was under a lot of pressure from other directions, that she was depressed over her career, but I knew it was all Manchester's fault."

"The Roger Manchester I left a few minutes ago seemed incapable of hurting someone intentionally," I said.

"He used her, I tell you, he used her."

"Are you really any better, Phil," Elaine asked, "using me to get at someone who used your sister? You were willing to tell me anything, even that you loved me, to get me to do what you wanted. I should have realized you only showed interest in me after I took over the part from Samantha. Did you love her, or were you just using her too?"

Reede stood silently, the drops of perspiration on his forehead barely visible in the stagelight.

"There's still the matter of Fields' death," I said. "For one reason or another you had a motive."

"But," Reede responded, "I have a alibi." He looked at Elaine through sorrowful eyes.

"Phil couldn't have killed Mr. Fields," she said. "The other night when he left our house, he waited down the road for me. I went back with him to the playhouse. I was hiding in the front seat when Roger confronted him, and I went back to his cottage with him. I didn't get home until early the next morning. That's why there was mud on my shoes." Elaine ran down toward me. "Oh, Daddy, I'm so ashamed of the mess I've gotten into."

I held her in my arms like I hadn't since she was a little girl, all the while feeling a bit of shame myself for what I had thought when I first saw the shoes. I walked with Elaine while she cried out her disillusionment. I didn't try to stop her when she said that perhaps she had been too hard on Reede and headed back to the playhouse to talk things out.

As I drove away from the complex, I noticed the mob of tourists had knocked down a section of rail fence. Staring at the scene, I had a sudden thought. If I stepped on it, I could get to the courthouse before Mrs. Nims closed up.

EVERYBODY WAS STANDING AND APPLAUDING. Leaning against the theatre's back wall beside me, Seth Fuller beamed. I don't know.

how Reede and Elaine had worked out their problems, but the lines at the end of *Death of the Duchess* had not been changed and Roger Manchester had given a magnificent performance.

I turned to Seth. "I guess you'd better come with me now."

"I should have known better, but one big score and my dreams of a powerful regional theatre would have been possible. How did you figure it out?"

"Someone had to be directing Tod and Rod. Your old tobacco barn in back was a great place to store the marijuana, and the records down at the courthouse show that while you sold off a lot of property, you still own that plot of land behind Clem's. The way I see it, you had a deal with the Bowers, but on one of his walks Fields stumbled on the cache and wanted in. That was the big deal that caused him to drop out of the play. That night you saw Manchester return to his cottage. You waited for Elaine and Reede to go into his place. Then you confronted Fields. When you couldn't work out something with him, you lost your hair-trigger timper and hit him with the trophy."

"Don't you see," Seth said without looking at me, "I thought the play couldn't go on without Fields, but he backed me into a corner. He wanted such a huge split I wouldn't have been able to put the play-house back in shape. There was nothing else I could do."

Maybe I shouldn't have, but I let Seth stay around long enough to accept the congratulations from the audience and cast. Today I had learned how bad shattered dreams could hurt.

CLEMENT COUNTY SETTLED DOWN SOON AFTERWARDS. Philip Reede went back to New York to launch *Death of the Duchess*. Elaine promised to come up for the premier. I didn't much like the idea of her traipsing off to New York, but it was her decision. Reluctantly Sarah Fricker returned the books she had "borrowed" from the library and put up a TV antenna to feed her fantasies.

The only excitement we've had around here lately came the day the State Police destroyed the confiscated marijuana. TV cameras were everywhere. And wouldn't you know, Reverend Spiker and CUT showed up to support the burning of "the demon weed" — downwind.

"Most people don't even know I'm still alive, but my subscription copies to MSMM always arrive on time. Is it still 1957?"

— Ambrose Bierce, writer

A long time ago the green elephant had been taken from him. Now, sixty years later, Sing Li was determined to get it back — at any cost!

THE GEM SHOW

by R. TUTTLE

MADAME CHEN WAS BORN MAI LING IN THE YEAR 1910 IN A tiny hamlet in Northern China. The citizens of her village were simple, hard working folk who knew little of the world beyond the limits of their homes except for the grim, frightening stories of ruthless bandits who roamed the barren hills spreading havoc and death.

One such outlaw was Sing Li, who in 1920 was a tall, lean, hard faced stripling of nineteen with ten years of bandit activity behind him. Born of simple stock, he had been kidnapped at an early age and had learned all aspects of the bandit's trade from the notorious Wong Ho. When Ho was killed in 1919 by government soldiers, Sing Li took over the band and continued to terrorize the hills. His constant companion was a hand sized gem shaped like an elephant that hung on a chain around his neck. Hand ground, the piece boasted hundreds of flat surfaces that literally shattered light into an everchanging spectrum of beautiful colors. Sing had stolen it from a rich merchant at the tender age of fourteen and it was said by his men that this gem was the only real love in Sing Li's life. He was known as the evil one with the green elephant to his victims.

In August of 1920, Sing Li and his band of cutthroats attacked Mai Ling's village.

The village elders and youth were not fighters so the battle, if indeed it could be called a battle, was shortlived. Mai Ling's mother managed to hide ten year old Mai but was caught by the lustful Sing Li in a clearing in back of her home.

Mai Ling watched in horror and disbelief as her mother was first

ravished then killed by the mad animal called the evil one with the green elephant.

After the bandit's orgy had run its course, they began to drink and soon were fighting among themselves for the pitiful loot from the village. Sing Li, drunk from rice wine was sitting in the clearing near the body of Mai Ling's mother lost in admiration of the green elephant. Over and over, he vowed he would take it to his grave.

He fell asleep.

Mai Ling waited several minutes, then crawled out of the bushes and after first touching her mother's dead face reverently, crawled over to the sleeping Sing Li. Her small, delicately featured face was tense with both sorrow and hatred. The green elephant gleamed at her in the moonlight.

He had taken her mother so she would take the elephant.

His head was slumped over his chest and he was leaning back against a tree. Her small hands quickly removed the elephant and chain from his neck. She saw a stubby dagger on the ground nearby. Anger flared in her face. She picked up the knife and was about to plunge it into his chest when his eyes suddenly opened.

They stared at each other for an instant, then he grabbed her arm.

"Pig!" he snarled.

Mai Ling leaned forward and clamped her teeth hard on his wrist. With a cry of pain, he let go of her arm. Mai darted off into the darkness, dropping the knife but clutching the green elephant.

Sing Li glanced down at his bleeding wrist, then tried to rise but the rice wine had taken its toll on his legs. He was too drunk to do anything but shout threats into the darkness.

A FEW DAYS LATER, MAI LING WAS FOUND BY GOVERNMENT soldiers and taken to a British Mission where she stayed for many years. A highly intelligent girl, she quickly learned English and the ways of the Western world, yet managed to maintain her own identity. At eighteen, she was a beautiful young lady with ambitions far beyond the scope of the small Mission so she joined a Merchant's caravan and went to Hong Kong. There, she quickly found work in a British household and in 1933, married a gem merchant many years her senior. She worked closely with her husband and soon became an expert in the gem trade.

And she still had the green elephant.

In 1936, her husband died of a heart attack leaving her with two small sons, Y and Fong, and a rich bank account. The talk now was of war and the possibility that the invaders might attack Hong Kong. Mai Ling, now Madame Chen, left Hong Kong and went to San Francisco

where she set up a gem shop on Grant Avenue. Her two sons went to school and she became a businesswoman to be reckoned with.

She kept the green elephant in a locked glass case in her office just off the shop. She gazed at it often, remembering the ruthless Sing Li and how he murdered her mother. Sometimes while sleeping she would dream about him. In her dream, she would have a gun and would shoot him as he pleaded for his life. During her waking hours, she often thought about him. Where was he? Was he dead?

SING LI WASN'T DEAD. IN 1923, HE HAD BEEN ARRESTED AND condemned to death. However, when the guards came to get him they found an empty cell with a barless window. After several months he surfaced in Singapore where he found work with a British Firm. He had a quick mind so he soon picked up the King's English even to the point of speaking with a slight British accent. He also made it a point to learn how to read and write his new language. Although a good worker and personable, he was still Sing Li the bandit so he made contact with the mob hierarchy and soon became adept at playing both sides of the game.

In 1937 he became tired of the constant battle for survival in both worlds and signed aboard a freighter bound for San Francisco. Moments after the ship docked, he slipped ashore, changed his name to Tom Lee and disappeared in Chinatown. He had no trouble finding work. His knowledge of English and his various talents — some questionable — opened many doors. He soon found himself getting rich in the herb business. A brush with the law in 1939 sent him to New York City where he changed his name to Lee Chau and started an import business in exotic herbs and oils.

Oddly enough, while in San Francisco, he had lived two blocks away from Madame Chen's shop. In fact, he had often passed her as she stood in the shop doorway having her morning tea and cigarette. Neither was aware that the other was in San Francisco. Tom Lee was a well dressed, distinguished looking gentleman, a far cry from the uncouth, shabbily attired Sing Li and of course, Madame Chen was a beautiful mature woman. It is quite possible that they, on occasion, had murmured good morning to each other in soft Cantonese as he passed her shop.

THE YEARS WENT BY AND IN 1956, MADAME CHEN, STILL obsessed by the notion that Sing Li might possibly be within reach of her revenge, hired a private detective named Sam Riley to try to find Li. An ex-cop of forty-five, Riley was a good private eye but he had some misgivings about taking a job to find a bandit named Li in

Northern China. However, he plunged into the task and with the help of friends in Hong Kong and Singapore — and considerable luck — managed to trace Sing Li to the freighter that brought him to San Francisco. From that point on, the trail evaporated.

Madame Chen was delighted with the information. "Mr. Riley, you are a fine detective," she said, giving him a magnificent check. Her face dropped. "But, now what? He may have changed his name."

"Probably has — several times. I dunno, Mrs. Chen. I had a lot of luck so far." He paused. "You know — that green elephant thing. He'd probably like to get it back."

"Yes," Madame Chen said thoughtfully. She nodded her head slowly. "Mr. Riley, to borrow an American expression — I will carry the ball from now on."

"Gotcha," grinned Riley. "Thanks for the job and the check. You're a nice lady — and good looking too."

"Thank you." She smiled.

The next month, Madame Chen gave her first gem show which she advertised in all the local newspapers. The turnout was small the first month but as the months wore on, each monthly show brought out more prospective customers. Her oldest son, Y, was now a lawyer in Los Angeles while the younger Fong had stayed to help his mother run the business. He was a handsome, softspoken man with an artistic bent so the shows became better and better.

As always, amid the display of gems and artifacts, stood the glass case containing the green elephant with the sign — NOT FOR SALE.

Years rolled by rapidly but Lee Chau never visited the shop. If he had even heard of Madame Chen, he ignored the name. He was much too busy making money and putting competitors out of business by fair means or foul. He married, had a family and became rich.

Many rich gentlemen came to Madame Chen's shows and admired the green elephant. A few wanted to buy it — at her price. But she would always smile and shake her head. She was certain that none of them bore any resemblance to the bandit from Northern China.

IN 1981, LEE CHAU, ALIAS TOM LEE, NEE SING LI WAS EIGHTY-one years old and decided to retire although he was in fairly good health despite his girth and poor eyesight. His mind was as sharp as ever and he began to spend some of his money collecting gems and artifacts. This decision was prompted somewhat by the memory of the green elephant. Even now, when he thought about the gem and how the little pig of a girl had stolen it, he was almost consumed with anger.

Why had he been such a fool to fall asleep that night! The memory of Mai Ling's mother and his conquest of her had faded into obscurity as had all his female conquests but the green elephant literally leered at him from the depths of his mind.

It was then that a business acquaintance told him about a little old lady who sold gems in San Francisco.

"And Friend Chau," the man said. "I have heard that she has a priceless gem of great beauty which is not for sale."

Lee's interest was aroused immediately. He had purchased many articles that "were not for sale". He had always found a way to get what he wanted.

"Thank you for the information," he said. "I shall visit San Francisco and this — Madame Chen."

ON THE FOLLOWING MONDAY, LEE CHAU BOARDED A JET FOR San Francisco. He arrived that evening and picked up his reservation at the Mark Hopkins Hotel, reflecting that when he had left the Singapore freighter so many years ago, his first job had been kitchen boy at the Mark Hopkins.

After supper, he took a cab to Grant Avenue and located Madame Chen's shop. Yes — he used to walk by the shop almost every day when he last lived in San Francisco. He remembered. There was this attractive woman — could that have been Madame Chen? No matter — at his age, women were out of the question.

There were lights on inside the shop and the door was still open so he stepped inside and looked around at the dazzling display of gems and artifacts.

A soft voice drew his attention. The speaker was Madame Chen and the words were in English. "We are about to close, Sir." At seventy, she was a trim, still attractive woman with gray hair and sparkling eyes. There were very few lines on her face.

The two had come face to face again after a span of sixty-one years but neither was aware of the other's identity. Lee Chau was no longer young and lean but old, rotund and somewhat bent over from age while Madame Chen bore no resemblance to the ten year old Mai Ling.

Lee bowed slightly. "You have a magnificent display of gems," he said in rumbling Cantonese. "I — am a collector of fine gems and artifacts."

She smiled and answered in her lilting native tongue. "I plan to have a gem show tomorrow. Perhaps you will honor me with your presence. I am Madame Chen."

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Madame Chen," Lee said, continuing

in Cantonese. "I am Lee Chau from New York and your show is the reason for my visit to your beautiful city."

"I will look forward to seeing you," she said. "You have the accent of Northern China."

He nodded. There was no point in dwelling on the youthful Sing Li so he quickly reverted to English. "I was raised in Singapore and my parents insisted that I learn the mother tongue as well at the King's English."

"I see." She smiled faintly. "Yes — there is some British in your excellent English. Amazing — a Chinese gentleman who talks like a member of the British Foreign Office."

Lee laughed. A fascinating woman, this Madame Chen. "I must return to my hotel now." He had decided not to mention the green gem at this point. He must look at it first. "Good evening, Madame Chen."

He bowed and left.

Madame Chen turned to her son, Fong who had been standing behind the counter and spoke in crisp English. "Mr. Chau speaks Chinese like a native. He didn't learn that in Singapore."

"Just as you say," smiled Fong.

She went into her office and lighted a cigarette.

THE NEXT DAY AT ONE O'CLOCK, LEE CHAU WALKED DOWN to Grant Avenue. After a quick lunch in a small cafe, he went to Madame Chen's shop. The aisles were crowded with shoppers looking at the displays and bargaining with the two clerks. He was about to light a cigarette when he saw the green elephant.

It was in a satin lined box which was in a glass case under a diamond studded Buddha — just as he remembered it. He dropped the unlighted cigarette on the floor and broke out in a cold sweat. Light from overhead had turned the elephant into an array of colors all riding on top of the green. It was his green elephant! Where had this old woman gotten it?

He walked slowly toward the case and saw the sign.

Of course it wasn't for sale. It was his — stolen from him.

"Mr. Chau?" Madame Chen was standing behind him. "Welcome to my show." She was wearing a red gown and two diamond ear rings hung just below her tightly groomed hair.

He turned. "Thank you." He quickly regained his composure. "Are you sure that green emerald is not for sale?"

"I'm sorry. I couldn't part with it. It's been in my family for years."

"Is it from China?" he asked.

"Yes."

"May I examine it more closely?"

"If you wish."

She opened the case with a small key and took out the satin lined box that held the gem. "There was a chain attached to it at one time but it was lost." She held out the box.

Their eyes met and their hands touched as Lee's fingers circled the box.

IT MUST HAVE BEEN HER EYES BECAUSE LEE SUDDENLY realized that this old woman was the same little girl who had stolen the elephant — and almost plunged a knife into his chest! If he hadn't awakened when he did — he would never have awakened. She must be the daughter of that shapely young woman he'd caught — the memory flooded back for an instant.

None of this emotion showed on Lee's face. He smiled and ran his fingers over the surface of the elephant just like he used to do so many years ago. The evil one with the green elephant, they used to call him. As his fingers fondled the gem surface he felt young again — like Sing Li used to feel.

"I will give you ten thousand dollars for it," he heard himself saying.

She smiled. "It has no price, Mr. Chau." She gently removed the box from his hands and put it back in the case. "I'm sorry." She closed the case and locked the door. "You look pale. Are you feeling all right?"

"Oh yes," Lee said, wiping a few beads of sweat from his forehead. "The beauty of the gem — as they say — got to me. You are certain that it isn't for sale?"

"Quite certain, Mr. Chau."

Lee had the feeling that further talk concerning the elephant would be useless. She wouldn't sell it so he would simply have to take it. "I trust you keep this gem in a safe place at night."

"Oh yes — I keep it in my office under lock and key. Would you care for a cup of tea? Then perhaps you might like to see my jade collection."

"It would be a pleasure."

He followed her through the crowd and into the office. A moment later, a girl brought tea and rice cookies and they sat down, she behind her desk and Chau in a chair.

After a sip of tea, Chau looked at her. "May I ask what part of China you are from?"

"I call Hong Kong my home. I came here to escape the war and decided to stay. It is a fine country."

"Yes. It is," agreed Lee. His mind was still on the green elephant. How could he get it? The young Sing Li would have just taken it but the old Lee Chau was lucky to move, much less steal something.

She looked at him closely. "I have the feeling that we have met before."

He shook his head. "I doubt it. I have never been to Hong Kong. Perhaps we had better look at the jade collection. I must get back to my hotel soon."

"Certainly."

As he made comments about the jade collection, his mind still pondered the green elephant problem. He couldn't steal it personally so he would have to hire a thief. But who? If he hired one locally, all details of the theft would be common knowledge within a few hours. He would have to hire someone from New York — and he knew just the man.

"Well," she said finally, "that is my jade."

"A beautiful collection and I may buy some — that is, if it's for sale."

"The jade — yes — the green elephant — no."

He rose and bowed. "I'll return in a day or so. Thank you."

"You are welcome, Mr. Chau." She held out her hand.

He clasped it briefly and left.

BRADFORD WINCHESTER ARRIVED IN SAN FRANCISCO THE next night at eight and immediately reported to Lee Chau at the Mark Hopkins. Winchester was a tall, slim, distinguished looking man of forty-five who could pass for a doctor, lawyer, college professor or just about any type and during his twenty year span as a con man or scam operator he had played all the roles mentioned and more.

He found Lee in the Tap Room sipping wine and smoking a cigarette. Lee bought him a scotch and soda and then told him about the green elephant leaving out some of the more violent details.

"Winchester, I want you to steal it for me."

"Sounds easy," Winchester said, sipping his drink. How can I case Madame Chen's shop?"

"I will take you there tomorrow. You are an old friend and wish to see the green elephant you have heard so much about."

"Fine," said Winchester. "What name shall I use?"

"Whatever." Lee shrugged.

Winchester thought for a second. "Nolan . . . Croft. That's good. And I'll present myself as a gem collector."

Lee nodded. "Just don't lay it on too thick. That woman is no

dummy. She probably knows more about gems than most gem collectors."

"I'll be careful. Now, let us discuss money."

"Five thousand dollars," Lee said.

"Six thousand plus expenses."

Lee took a sip of his wine. Winchester was probably the best in his field. "I agree."

"Good." Winchester picked up the menu. "I think I'll have a steak dinner. I'm hungry."

Lee sighed. "Be my guest."

THE NEXT MORNING AT TEN, LEE CHAU AND WINCHESTER walked into Madame Chen's shop and found Madame Chen in her office reading a Chinese newspaper at her desk. She looked up as they stood in the doorway.

"Mr. Chau — and friend. Come in and sit down." She removed her reading glasses.

After the introductions were made, Winchester — or Croft — went into his act.

"I have heard a great deal about you, Madame Chen, and it is a pleasure to meet you at last. I must show you my gem collection sometime."

"I would love to see it," she said softly. "Mr. Croft."

He cast a professional eye toward the green elephant glowing in its case. "Mr. Chau was telling me about this particular gem" He put on his glasses and peered into the case. "A fine example of emerald that appears to be common to certain parts of China."

"Would you care to examine it more closely?" she asked.

"Yes. If you would be so kind."

She rose and went over to the case. A moment later, she carefully placed the gem on the desk in front of Winchester and Lee.

Winchester then extracted a tiny magnifying glass from his coat pocket, bent down and peered at the gem through the glass for almost a minute. Lee and Madame Chen, their faces devoid of any expression, watched. Finally, he straightened up.

"I'll give you twenty thousand for it, Madame," Winchester said.

Lee's eyes flickered slightly while Madame Chen's eyes narrowed.

"I'm sorry — Mr. Croft. Your offer is quite flattering but — I cannot sell it." She picked up the gem and put it back into the case.

Winchester smiled. "I don't blame you. I trust you keep it under lock and key at all times."

"Oh — I do," smiled Madame Chen. "Would you be interested in

seeing some valuable jade?"

"Of course," said Winchester.

Lee Chau sighed. As Number one son might have put it, Winchester was a crock.

THAT NIGHT WAS ONE OF THOSE MISERABLE, FOGGY NIGHTS so common to San Francisco in the winter season. A heavy fog had rolled under and over the Golden Gate Bridge and had spread itself over the city turning walkers into ghosts and buildings into giant gravestones. It was a perfect night for killers, muggers — and Winchester to carry out his six thousand dollar caper. Attired in black — even to a black cap — he made the turn on Grant Avenue at exactly three in the morning. Several minutes later, he was standing in front of Madame Chen's shop. An occasional car went by and the sidewalk traffic was sparse, limited to a few staggering drunks.

An expert on locks and doors, he quickly removed the lock and cut the wire connected to the burglar alarm. So far — a piece of cake. He then opened the door softly and stepped inside. He stood for several minutes and listened. Madame Chen and son slept upstairs. Satisfied with the silence, he then slipped down the aisle to the office and found it unlocked. Nice of Madame Chen to leave it unlocked. He slipped a tiny flashlight out of his pocket and a moment later, the green elephant was flashing back at the feeble ray of the flashlight.

It took exactly eight minutes to open the lock on the case — one of those cursed Oriental locks! He pulled out the box containing the elephant, closed the cover and then filled his pockets with some of the more interesting looking gem studded artifacts in the room. They would look good in his New York apartment.

He then slipped quietly out of the shop and into the dirty night.

LEE CHAU, AT THE TAIL END OF A BOTTLE OF WINE AND several packs of cigarettes, was waiting impatiently when Winchester walked into the hotel room.

"Nothing to it, Mr. Chau," he bragged. He opened the box and held up the exposed elephant.

"Give it to me!" exclaimed Lee, showing unusual emotion.

"The money first. Six thousand five hundred dollars."

Lee snorted in disgust and handed Winchester an envelope, then dug five one hundred dollar bills out of his wallet. "There. Now get back to New York on the first plane!"

Winchester counted the money, nodded and handed over the Elephant. Then, he left the room.

Lee couldn't believe his eyes. After all these years! The green elephant had returned to its rightful owner! He fingered the cold, flashing surface, then carefully took it out of the box and squeezed it like Sing Li used to do.

He felt a pin prick — then another — he dropped the gem and looked in horror at his fingers. Little droplets of blood were oozing out of his fingers! The gem had a poison vial attached underneath. The old woman must have recognized him. He'd fallen victim to the bite of the cobra! He'd killed many enemies that way. He must get to a phone — a doctor —!

He slipped into oblivion.

A figure stepped into the room and quickly picked up the gem and box, and hurried out.

IT WAS FOUR-THIRTY THREE THAT SAME MORNING WHEN Fong walked into Madame Chen's office and put the green elephant in front of her. She was wearing a green night robe and smoking a cigarette. She was smiling.

Fong spoke. "Winchester is in San Francisco Airport at this moment waiting for his flight to New York. Chau is under the care of a doctor."

She nodded. "Let Winchester go. The man is an artist and I admire artists even if they *are* thieves."

"Are you certain that Chau is Sing Li?"

"Yes. He wears my teeth marks on his wrist. I was suspicious of him when I first met him and when he saw the green elephant, he paled and the marks became quite visible." She touched the gem. "Ten years ago, I was told about Bradford Winchester so when Chau and he came in here —." She shrugged. Then, she laughed. "When I first met your father — he was a real gem expert — I showed him the elephant and —." She took a small hammer out of the desk drawer. "He said it was fine workmanship but made of a special type of green —." She brought the hammer down hard on the gem — shattering it. "Glass."

"Will Chau — Sing Li die?"

"No. It was not the bite of the cobra — merely the sting of the spider." She pushed the green glass pieces into a wastebasket. "He will remember Madame Chen."

AND SING LI DID RECOVER, A BROKEN AND FRIGHTENED MAN who hurried back to his apartment in New York where he became a recluse, refusing to see or talk to anybody. ●

It started out as an open and shut case. Trouble was, it was entirely too open!

THE PERFECT CRIME REVISITED

by TERRY BLACK

"I THOUGHT YOU SAID IT WAS OPEN AND SHUT," SAID Detective Sergeant Barton Rimple, combing his fingers through a shock of blue-black hair. "Now you say we're dead in the water. What the hell's the problem?"

Calvin Cupflutter winced. Cupflutter was new to Homicide; he was Rimple's junior by fifteen years, and had soft, baby-bottom features on a sunburnt oval face. He was often asked for his ID in bars. "You'd better see for yourself, sir," he said cautiously. "We have what you might call . . . a complication."

"It better be good," snapped Rimple.

Rimple and Cupflutter jaywalked across the street, in front of a guacamole-colored Buick with out-of-state plates and a decal that said SMILE, GOD LOVES YOU. Another twelve paces brought them to the sliding glass doors of the Rupert Muncie Convention Center, a dome-like building with colorless walls and sloping, mirrored windows.

"Godzilla's doghouse," muttered Rimple.

Cupflutter led him inside, past a dense gaggle of people milling in the foyer. The scene of the crime was an immense auditorium, kidney-shaped, with long rows of folding chairs surrounding a raised platform. Refreshments were available on tables to the rear. Beside one of the tables was a portly, middle-aged man with a Sterling silver letter opener jutting from his back.

SPECTATORS JOSTLED FOR A VIEW OF THE VICTIM. TWO harried patrolmen were shooing them off.

"Victim's name is Floyd Burbank," said Cupflutter, consulting his notebook. "Thirty minutes ago he went to the men's room, started back, stopped for a sandwich and keeled over dead. They checked his body and found the letter opener between his shoulder blades. No one knows who did it or why."

Rimble grunted. "What made you think it was open and shut?"

Cupflutter pointed. On the floor was a vital clue: a thin line of blood trailed from the dead man's outstretched finger, forming a wavering — but quite clear — indictment of his killer. The message said simply, **THE BUTLER DID IT.**

"Well, what's the problem?" asked Rimble. "Did you talk to the butler? Does he have an alibi?"

Cupflutter could only groan, and shake his head, and jerk his thumb at a brightly-painted banner stretched between stanchions over hundreds of smartly-dressed men wearing topcoats, vests and black shoestring bowties. The banner read **54th ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL BUTLER'S CONVENTION — WELCOME, BUTLERS!**

Rimble's eyebrow twitched. "Good God," he moaned. "There must be a thousand butlers in here!"

"Twelve hundred," said Cupflutter.

"I'm getting a migraine," said Rimble, rubbing his forehead.

"Let me bring you an aspirin, sir," said eight crisp voices, all at once. ●



EPISODE

11

**THUNDERING
DOOM**

The mobster's life had been good, long and healthy. His death was something else!

THE OTHER SIDE

by C. BRUCE HUNTER

DON ALBERTO TRUDGED THROUGH THE MIST, SQUINTING TO keep track of the hooded figure who marched steadily ahead of him and occasionally sniffing the air for traces of brimstone that somehow weren't there. The place was not what he expected. It didn't matter, though. He was ready to go; he had already cheated Death for more than a decade.

That was one of the benefits of being wealthy. He could afford the very best in health care and was always first in line for transplants. His heart had gone first. Since then there were two kidney failures, new corneas to fix his cataracts, and half a dozen other operations along the way.

With so many problems, being a top man in the Mob didn't hurt, either. It meant that he could always find a donor — willing or unwilling — if he needed one.

When the end finally did come, when he was no longer able to keep his body functioning, the Don went without protest. Death was so much a part of his business that he had long ago stopped fearing it, and his own death had come almost as a pleasant surprise. He couldn't quite remember the transition from the hospital bed to . . . to wherever he was now. He had simply become aware of being led by a hooded figure across an endless expanse of ankle-deep mud shrouded by endless sheets of mist.

All things considered, the place wasn't as bad as he'd expected. The mist didn't bother him. He wasn't curious to know what might be around him. And the mud, if that's what it was, was cold but not unpleasant. At least there was no fire and brimstone, just the mist, the

mud, and of course the hooded figure he had instinctively known he was supposed to follow. It could be a lot worse.

THEN HE HEARD THE SOUNDS. THEY WERE SQUISHY, SPLASHING sounds and they were coming steadily closer. Patches of dark gray soon dotted the mist, and as the squishes became louder, the patches blackened and gradually crystalized into more or less human shapes.

Don Alberto winced when they came out of the mist. They *were* human but grotesquely mutilated. A dozen of them appeared on all sides, surrounding him and leaving no way of escape. The nearest grinned at him, but it wasn't a grin. As the creature moved closer, the Don saw that what looked like a grin was actually the effect of muscles contorted around an empty eye socket. Terrified by the sight, he turned to run but was immediately confronted by another, whose emaciated abdomen was split from hip to navel, and one whose chest had ruptured hideously. Others followed and quickly closed around him.

"It's inevitable," the hooded figure said calmly, turning to reveal a face whose shrunken skin gave it the appearance of a skull.

"What do they want?" the Don rasped as the creatures reached for him, but he barely heard the answer over the sounds of tearing flesh.

"They've come," the hooded figure said, "to get their organs back."



She was in the big lonely building late at night, but she wasn't alone. There was a killer with her!

The Deep Pocket

by DAVID LINZEE

IT WAS FOUR IN THE MORNING WHEN SUSIE, CROSSING THE lobby with a fresh cup of coffee, had a fleeting sense that something was out of place.

She paused and looked around with some trepidation. She had been working here only a month, and it seemed that whenever something was wrong it turned out to be her fault. But right now, she decided, she was imagining it: the law offices of Wentworth, Mosby & Stant looked as punctiliously elegant as usual. On the wall between the elevators, the stainless steel letters which spelled out the firm's name gleamed even in the faint light. The dark wood furniture and beige carpeting were fresh from the ministrations of the night cleaning crew. The magazines in the waiting area were neatly stacked, the ash trays polished. The vase on the receptionist's console awaited the morning delivery of fresh flowers.

Susie shrugged. She supposed that she was only missing the familiar background noises — the low continuous hubbub of voices, buzzing telephones, clattering typewriters, and whirring copying machines. Just now, she could hear only the sigh of the ventilating system.

She crossed the lobby to the huge windows. This was the twentieth floor — the firm occupied this entire floor, as well as the one above —

and she looked out on a vista of black towers and distant, empty streets. In the daytime, downtown had a population in the tens of thousands; at this hour, she mused, she was one of a couple of hundred.

She turned and walked back to her office. The long corridor was dim as a tunnel, and the doors were thrown open on empty offices. It amused Susie that she — the lowliest paralegal in the firm — had the place to herself. She felt like kicking off her shoes and capering down the hall, or sneaking into one of the partners' offices and helping herself to a cigar.

But then she noticed that she was not alone: there was a sliver of light showing beneath the door of Harry Stant, the senior litigating partner. The mere proximity of this imposing figure was enough to puncture Susie's irreverent mood. Last week he had frostily advised her that she must attain the proper legal gravity: her penchant for playing practical jokes on the mail-room boys and sending facetious memos to the associates was most unsuitable. Adopting a sober expression, she hurried back to her office.

The tiny cubicle was stacked with boxes. They contained a client's financial records, and she had been ordered to get them organized by next morning. As she lugged yet another box onto her desk, she noticed a memo lying on her in-tray. Dated yesterday, it said that since an unnamed associate had reported his keys lost, the office locks would be changed the next day. New keys would be distributed —

Abruptly Susie realized why she had thought something was wrong as she crossed the lobby. She should not have been able to cross the lobby at all. The heavy security doors between the elevators and the reception console should have been closed and locked. But they had been wide open.

She winced as hot coffee sloshed over her fingers. Her hand was shaking. She put the cup down and stood.

What was she going to do now? Make a mad dash for the elevators? She caught sight of her reflection in the dark window — shoulders hunched, hand to her mouth — and made herself relax. She was being foolish. They'd simply forgotten to close the security doors last evening. She'd never known them to forget, but still —

She would go to Mr. Stant. Yes, that would make her feel better. She hoped he would not think it was another of her pranks; if he did, one look at her face ought to convince him otherwise. She left her office and started down the corridor.

But after a few steps she stopped dead. The light in Stant's office had gone out.

"He's not there."

SHE GASPED AND SWUNG ROUND. BUT THE DIM CORRIDOR was empty.

"Stant's not there. The night typists are gone. And the computer programmers. And the cleaning crew. There's nobody here but you and me."

The voice was hushed, hollow, diffuse. It was coming through speakers in the ceiling. The man was talking to her over the office paging system: he could be anywhere.

Instinctively Susie began to back up, toward the elevators.

"Are you that anxious to meet me? You're heading in my direction." Susie froze.

"Yes, I can see you. Shall I prove it? Your hair is long and either light-brown or blonde. You're wearing a red turtleneck and dark slacks. Rather Bohemian for a law firm, but you're pretty enough."

He broke off, and for a moment there was only the sound of his breathing, seeping through the speakers.

"I want a word with you. Go to a phone."

Susie turned back into her office, shut the door and leaned against it. Her heart was pounding against her ribs and she could hardly breathe. She glanced around for something she could use to block the door. But the document boxes were not heavy enough, and she knew she could not budge her desk.

She lunged for the telephone and stabbed buttons: got an outside line and called the police.

"Don't do that," said the hushed voice over the speakers.

She froze with the receiver in hand. She could hear the first ring on the line.

"Hang up that phone or I'm coming down there for you!"

SHE DROPPED THE RECEIVER IN THE CRADLE. HOW COULD HE have known what she was doing? In an instant she understood: he must be at the receptionist's console, and he had seen the switchboard light up as soon as she lifted her receiver. She could not call out without his knowing at once, and he was between her and the elevators.

"That's better. Now this time just dial the switchboard."

Susie stumbled around the desk and sank into her chair. Staring at the telephone, she could not pick it up.

"Come on," said the man irritably. "I don't mean you any harm."

The assurance gave her just enough nerve to pick up the telephone and make the call — as it was no doubt meant to do.

He came on the line at once. "What's your name?"

"I'm — Susan Verver."

"I take it from the position of your office that you are a litigation paralegal and that you work for Harry Stant. Correct?"

As he said this, it penetrated Susie's confusion and anxiety that he was a lawyer himself. It was not only the inside knowledge he displayed; it was in the very tone and phrasing of the question.

"Yes," Susie mumbled.

"I came to get something of Stant's. Unfortunately for you, I couldn't find it in his office, or his secretary's office. Therefore I conclude that you have it."

So it had been he in Stant's office all along. Susie cringed at the realization. Swallowing, she managed to bring out the question: "What is it?"

"His appointment calendar."

She did not have to look. The black-backed calendar was lying on the other side of her desk. She had been scheduling depositions for Stant all day.

"I — I don't have it."

"You're lying," he replied, and she realized that she had hesitated too long. "Come on, don't waste my time."

Susie took the receiver away from her ear, as if that would somehow hold him back, give her time to think and room to maneuver.

An idea came to her. Once, on the telephone, she had recorded a young lawyer's candid comments about a client, and teased him that she planned to turn the cassette over to the client. It had been one of her most unfortunate practical jokes — but the tape had been clear enough. If she could work the same trick now, it would give her something to bargain with. Switching on her dictaphone, she laid the mike next to the speaker attachment of the telephone. She put the call through it.

"All right," she said, "I have the calendar."

"Look at it." She jumped at the sound of his voice, which seemed so much louder and closer through the speaker. "Is it up to date? Does it have Stant's appointments for yesterday?"

She opened the calendar. There were lines written beneath the previous date in the neat hand of Stant's secretary: times, places, names. What could be so important about them? "Yes," Susie said. "What do you want?"

"Just bring it to me."

She glanced at the turning reels of the cassette in her dictaphone. "Who are you? What do you want?"

In the momentary pause, she expected the click of the receiver going down. But he replied, "My name is Chester Hellmuth. You know it?"

She did. He was a partner in a firm across town. Without waiting for an answer, he went on, "If you're satisfied, Miss Verver, I'll expect you in the library in one minute." The line went dead.

SUSIE STARED DOWN AT THE CALENDAR FOR ANOTHER moment before snapping it shut. Perhaps Hellmuth and Stant were on opposite sides of a case, and Hellmuth hoped to gain some slight advantage by knowing Stant's appointments. She strained to believe this, but could not. Hellmuth was risking too much.

She longed to stay where she was just a little longer, to work out what she would do, what she would say to him. But there was no time. Besides, her nerve might fail if she did not go at once.

She stood and switched off the dictaphone. With the cassette in hand, she hesitated: should she bring the calendar along? If her plan worked, Hellmuth would never get to see it.

Still, she took it. She must not arouse his suspicions. She left the office and started down the corridor, pausing only at a secretary's desk. There she took an envelope — blank but for the firm's name and address engraved in one corner — and slipped the cassette into it. Sealing the envelope, she put it in her pocket.

She found the library empty. Hellmuth must still be out in the lobby, watching the switchboard and elevators until he was certain that she had arrived.

Susie's gaze strayed nervously about the room. Shelves of case reporters and digests rose up into the shadows far above her head. There was a spiral staircase leading to a gallery and a door which gave access to the twenty-first floor lobby. Going from floor to floor, she had often used the stairs as a shortcut. She recalled how the lawyers, interrupted at their studies, would frown up at her. Their books and yellow pads were lying on the tables even now, awaiting the morning and the resumption of work. It was only a few hours away. Five hours from now, the room, and the building, and the city, would be full of people. But at this moment there was no one to help her. She fingered the envelope in her pocket, and waited.

The door from the lobby opened, and Hellmuth emerged from the shadows below the gallery. He was a tall man in his fifties, heavyset and balding. He wore the customary dark pinstriped suit, the vest

buttoned tightly over a slight paunch.

He glanced at the calendar she held clutched to her breast. "Bring it here."

Susie stepped back, slipping the envelope from her pocket with her free hand. "No. I have an offer to make you."

The words brought no surprise to his face, only a look of irascible boredom. "What kind of offer?"

She backed up into the corridor. There was a mailchute set into the wall. Her eyes never leaving Hellmuth, she raised her arm until the envelope was poised over the slot. "I recorded our talk — the important part of it. The tape is in here. It will come back in tomorrow's mail, and they'll know who you are, and what you tried to do. Unless you turn and walk out of here now, I'll drop it."

"Ah," Hellmuth murmured. "So that was your scheme."

"Look, I'm not bluffing." Susie did not understand his words, and tried to cover the only flaw she could see in her plan. "I did record you."

"Oh, I know *that*. You think I can't tell when I'm switched through a speakerphone? That distinctive bottom-of-the-well sound? I work in an office just like this, you know."

He was advancing on her as he spoke. "Stop!" she cried. "Stop or I'll let this go."

But he did not stop. Susie waited until the last moment, when he was just an arm's length away, and opened her fingers.

The envelope dropped a few inches and jammed in the slot.

Hellmuth did not glance at it. His tired, contemptuous eyes were on hers. "The cassette's too thick. Haven't you noticed that you can't get more than one letter at a time through those slots?"

Slowly he reached out a hand. Susie cringed, pressing herself back against the wall, but he merely took the envelope from the slot and put it in his pocket.

"Now bring the calendar over," he said, turning away.

He settled himself at one of the long teak tables, as if it were his own desk, and she set the calendar before him and waited in meek silence, as if she were his secretary.

"You might as well know the rest now," Hellmuth said.

She shook her head. "I don't want to know. Take what you want and go. Please."

"No," he said. "It can't be as simple as that."

A chill knifed through Susie's insides. "You said I wouldn't be harmed."

"That was expedient." He paused, then went on, "I can't leave you

to tell them about it in the morning."

WHEN HE FINISHED SPEAKING THE SILENCE IN THE ROOM seemed palpable to Susie. It seemed to hold her motionless. When Hellmuth came at her, she would not even be able to raise a hand against him.

The silence stretched on unendurably. When at last Hellmuth made a move, it was only to open the calendar in front of him.

"You know where Stant was this afternoon?"

He asked the question indifferently, putting on his reading glasses, as if he would merely dismiss her as soon as she answered. She realized that he could not bring himself to kill her. Not yet. The paralyzing fear lost its grip on her. If Hellmuth wanted to talk, let him talk.

She mumbled an answer: "At the hospital, I think."

"Yes. The question was, which hospital?" He had reached the day's date, and his finger traced the line he wanted. Then he wrote down the name of the hospital and the client Stant had seen there. "You know, when you suddenly find yourself a criminal, it is a great advantage if you also happen to be a lawyer. You have all the right connections."

He closed the calendar and put the note in his pocket. "Getting the access card for this building, and key to this office, for instance. A simple matter, as one of your associates has the locker next to mine at the Athletic Club.

"In fact, I would never have heard about Stant's visit to the hospital if I hadn't been at the Bar Association cocktail party. Someone said, they'd heard Harry Stant called an ambulance chaser before, but they hadn't realized how true it was."

Hellmuth was leaning back in his chair, dangling his glasses over his pinstriped paunch. He seemed to have forgotten that Susie was there. He was listening to his own mellifluous voice.

"A young girl — the daughter of an acquaintance, I believe — was the victim of a hit and run early yesterday morning." He looked at his watch. "Exactly twenty-two hours ago. Even though she'd not yet regained consciousness, Stant was at the hospital by noon, offering condolences and signing up her parents as clients. I don't blame Stant for being greedy. It's an excellent case. The girl, when she comes to, will suffer excruciating pain and suffering, and will be crippled for life. So the damages will be in seven figures easily. Stant will get a third of that. If he can bring a case — for the question is, against whom? Will the girl be able to identify the driver? There were no other witnesses. And will the driver turn out to be a deep pocket? You know the phrase, 'a deep pocket?'"

"Yes," Susie responded dully. "It means a defendant with lots of money." She knew what Hellmuth would say next, and the knowledge sickened her.

"Quite. And the defendant in this case would be a deep pocket, as it is I." With hardly a pause, the calm recitation continued. "So that leaves only the problem of whether the victim will be able to identify me. I can't be sure. But I have my initials on my license plate — a foolish vanity — and I have an expensive and rather distinctive car. And my face is well-known. She looked right into my eyes, the moment before —"

His voice broke, for the first time. For a while he sat in silence, folding and unfolding his glasses. When he resumed, he had managed to find again his loftily ironic tone. "I can't take the risk. I am a lawyer myself, and I do not intend to fall into the clutches of my own kind. They'd strip me clean. If the girl identifies me, the District Attorney will indict me for manslaughter, among other charges. I'll be convicted, fined, and sentenced to several years in prison. Then Stant will simply take the conviction to civil court and they'll award him all the damages he asks for."

He rolled his chair back from the table and stood to face her. "I would lose my freedom, my reputation, and every cent I've got. Just because I had a few too many drinks at a party, and was in a hurry driving home. I've concluded that it is too high a price to pay."

SUSIE UNDERSTOOD NOW WHAT HE HAD BEEN DOING. HE had not been talking to her, but to himself. He had made up his mind to kill her — and to finish off the wretched girl in the hospital — long ago. But he had quailed for a moment before the actual deed. He had needed to run over the chain of his reasoning again, to persuade himself. He was a persuasive man: he was a lawyer. Now he could murder her.

"It can't work — don't you see?" Susie pleaded in desperation. "They'll suspect —"

"There will be no one for them to suspect, if the girl dies before regaining consciousness. And with luck you will pass for an accident."

Involuntarily she glanced over his head, at the spiral staircase that led to the upper floor.

"Yes," she heard Hellmuth say. "The steps are narrow and it's dark in here. You'll be found at the bottom with a fractured skull. A fall."

As he spoke, he began to move unhurriedly around the table. For a moment his deliberateness held Susie in thrall. Then, as he came around the table, she saw the heavy crystal paperweight in his hand.

Susie swept a chair from beneath the table and sent it rolling at his legs. He bent and put out a hand to ward it off, and before he could straighten up she was round the table and running for the stairs.

IN A SECOND SHE WAS THROUGH THE DOOR TO THE TWENTY-first floor lobby. She pushed the door closed behind her and leaned against it. She had only a few seconds before he would come after her.

Her glance fell on the big grandfather clock — a firm heirloom — which stood next to the door. She knew it was too heavy for her to move. But . . .

Straining on tiptoe she managed to grasp the newels atop the clock. She heaved backwards with all her might. The clock teetered and fell over in a crash of glass and metal, blocking the door.

Susie could not hope that it would stop him. But it would hold him up. She darted across the lobby and stabbed at the elevator call button. The doors slid open. By sheer good luck, one elevator had come to rest on this floor.

And then, on the threshold of the empty, beckoning car, she stopped dead.

Turning, she saw the door behind her was still shut. By now Hellmuth should have been there, straining the jamb against the heavy clock.

He had not followed her. He was not in the library, but in the lobby directly below her. He had only to push the call button, and the elevator would obediently stop for him. She would be trapped.

Susie backed away, watching the doors slide shut and the indicator light go off.

There was a door to her right, leading to the emergency stairs. Susie took a step toward it — and then realized that Hellmuth could be watching the landing below, waiting for her. Or he could be on his way up.

She stood frozen in an agony of indecision.

“SUSAN.”

It was the hollow whisper over the paging system. He was where she had known and dreaded he would be: in the lobby below, at the reception console.

“You’re too clever for your own good. You can’t escape. You can only prolong the misery. If you had gotten in that elevator, it would all be over by now.”

She stared out the windows at the black skyscrapers in the distance, as the voice filtered out of the dimness around her.

"Now it's going to be a long drawn-out business. But the end is certain. I've propped open the fire door, so you can't get by without my seeing you. And I've called all the elevators. When they get here I'll block the doors open. Then I'll come up the stairs."

He broke off for a moment, and there was only the hum of static from the speakers.

Then he was back. "That was the second elevator. I've blocked it. Only two more left. Why wait, Susan? Get it over with. Just walk down the stairs. One instant of pain, and it will all be over with. Just walk down the stairs."

He clicked the receiver down and the speakers were silent. Another elevator must have arrived.

SUSIE BURIED HER FACE IN HER HANDS AND GAVE A STRANGLED sob. She was trapped. There was only one means of escape from her fear. For a second, she was on the brink of yielding to him.

With an effort, she dropped her hands to her sides, opened her eyes and looked at the empty lobby around her. The man's assured, persuasive voice, with its veneer of sympathy, had held her mesmerized, like a rabbit caught in the headlights of an onrushing car. But it wouldn't work. She would not give up. If she had time, she would use it. When Hellmuth came for her, he would not find her unarmed.

There must be something she could use as a weapon. She nearly sank into hopelessness again as she cast her mind over the contents of the office: books, files, pencils . . . Nothing that would help.

And then Susie had it. With a steady hand, she unlocked the security door and went through to the reception area. Her weapon was in the copying room, and she started to run down the hall toward it — then hesitated.

She turned back to the door. There was no use locking it, for Hellmuth had the key. But still she stood swinging the door to and fro on its hinges for a few precious seconds. The weapon was not enough. She needed something that would give her an opportunity to use it. Her idea, once again, was for a practical joke — the oldest, dumbest practical joke in the world. But it would give her a chance . . . if she had time to set it up.

IN FACT SHE WAS READY FOR HELLMUTH IN PLENTY OF TIME. She heard his footsteps echoing up the concrete stairwell, and through the crack in the door she watched him cross the lobby toward her. He was moving slowly, breathing hard from his exertions.

He paused in the doorway, frowning at her where she sat behind the

reception console. That smug, contemptuous frown.

"It would have been easier if you'd come down, Susan. For both of us."

She was silent.

"It's over now, in any case. Come out from behind that desk. You can't —"

"Shut up!" Susie shouted at him. "I've heard enough talk from you."

His jaw set and his right hand came up, holding the heavy paperweight. He threw the door open. The *Black's Law Dictionary* slipped from its perch atop the door and slammed onto his shoulder.

He gasped in pain and staggered forward. "Of all the stupid — you —"

He did not finish. Susie leapt from behind the console and swung at him.

The blade from the paper cutter was not very sharp, but it was heavy, and it had all her strength behind it. There was a gritty thud as it cut through to the bone of Hellmuth's forearm. He cried out and clutched at his wound. But he did not let the paperweight fall.

Susie fell back a step, gripping the cutter tightly in both hands. "Drop it," she pleaded hoarsely. But a look at Hellmuth's face told her that he would not.

He transferred the paperweight to his bloody left hand and came at her again. Susie hefted the blade to her shoulder and swung it two-handed, like an axe.

The blow caught him squarely on the temple. He toppled over. Black blood seeped from beneath his thinning hair into the elegant beige carpet.

Susie dropped the blade and backed away, choking on sobs of horror and relief. She spun and ran. Ran twenty-one stories, down to the street.

"We were stranded at the South Pole for six months, cut off from the civilized world without supplies. Luckily, one of the crew had his collection of mystery magazines, which we were forced to burn for warmth and eat for food. I can honestly say that MSMM burned brighter and longer and gave off more heat, and was much tastier than its competitors!"

— Admiral Byrd, explorer

An unauthorized surveillance is a tricky business. It gets trickier when one corpse too many turns up!

Stakeout

by DAN J. MARLOWE

I CUT THE IGNITION AND SWITCHED OFF THE CAR LIGHTS AT the blinking yellow signal of the intersection. Beside me on the front seat, my detective partner, Tony Costanza, checked the set of his shoulder holster as our unmarked black police sedan rolled ahead silently into the next block.

The car curved in a sweeping arc into the shadowed mouth of an alley and drifted down a narrow, walled-in passageway. I eased the car to a stop with just a touch of the brake as the early-morning stillness settled in around us.

I raised an arm and sleeved the breathless summer night's perspiration from my forehead, then sat for a second listening to the low-pitched street noises and other night sounds peculiar to this particular backwater of the city.

"Let's go, Mickey," Tony growled. "Move it. He's not comin' to us out here."

"He's not coming to us in there, either, if he hears us," I said softly. "Don't slam the car door when you get out."

Tony's snort was muffled. "Eleven nights in a row we stake out this miserable hole, an' eleven nights you got to say 'Don't slam the car door'? At least get yourself a new line."

I slid out on my side. The macadam underfoot was damp with night mist. Tony's sardonic whisper floated out to me from the front seat. "I was tellin' Louise before you picked me up tonight it was a damn good

thing this had been her idea in the first place, or she'd never have trusted me out till all hours all these nights, even with you as chap-erone."

I grimaced at the mention of Louise's name. I removed my watch with its tell-tale radium dial and put it into my pocket. Across the alley Tony scrambled from the sedan. We met at the front of the car, Tony's solid two hundred pounds bulking larger-than-life in the night.

TONY HAD BEEN MY DETECTIVE PARTNER FOR TWO YEARS. He was three years younger. We had both made plainclothes from the ranks, within a month of each other. With little in common between us, the partnership had worked. Originally we had tolerated each other. Lately it had been something less than that. And no wonder.

I turned left into the darkness and followed the alley brickwork with my palm until I came to a heavy wooden door set flush with the building line. "Bronson called me this mornin' an' asked for his keys back," Tony muttered from behind me.

"Tell me inside," I said tautly.

I wanted no distractions while we were getting inside. The big key in my left hand opened the alley door whose bottom sill was eighteen inches above the bed of the alley. I felt the familiar tensed apprehension in stomach and chest as I stepped up into the pitch-black opening. Automatically I freed my arm from the clinging pull of my shoulder holster, the leather made sticky by the night's humidity.

I took two steps forward and stopped, listening, my hearing pitched up into the forefront of my consciousness. Behind me I could hear Tony's breathing and the faint rasp of the closing door. I crept softly down the wooden-floored corridor, so solidly dark it was like pushing into a substance with weight.

I placed my feet carefully, a hand on the wall beside me checking off the corridor doors. At the third one I produced another key and with infinite care unlocked and eased open the door.

In a sliver of murky light from the front room of the jewelry shop beyond, I could see the usual jumble of materials on the watchmaker's bench in the dingy little workroom immediately before me. I widened the aperture silently and stepped inside.

Tony moved in past me, and I closed the door gently. A man might get used to that dry-mouthed, adrenalin-accelerated, heart-pounding corridor-walk in a hundred years, I reflected. And then again, he might not.

I could see the heavy timber leaning against the wall, the timber that should have fitted snugly into the stout braces bolted to either side of

the door through which we'd entered. It had taken a lot of talking to induce Joe Bronson to leave that timber down eleven nights in a row. Talking wouldn't have been enough if I hadn't had something on Joe Bronson.

TONY WALKED OUT THROUGH THE HANGING CURTAIN INTO the front part of the shop. I made an instinctive negative gesture he couldn't see. For an instant I could see him silhouetted against the lighter background of the shop's front windows. The off-street refraction of light illumined the blunt, swarthy features and the surprising red hair, the rough, rusty red of the off-type redhead. I knew that thick, hirsute forearms and pillar-like thighs bulged the material of the lightweight summer suit that was just a blur in the part-darkness.

I kept my voice down when Tony walked back into the workroom. "One of these nights you're going to do that one time too often, man."

"Ahhhhh, we're wastin' our time here." Tony's disgust was evident in his voice. A penlight flashed on in his hand and spotlighted the base of a telephone on the watchmaker's bench. Tony dialed rapidly, the whirring clicks staccato in the quiet.

"Costanza," he said curtly. "Where is he?" He listened impatiently. "All right, all right," he interrupted. "You told me. Music with it I can't use. We'll call you when we leave." He replaced the receiver. "No action again tonight. Jigger says our man is in bed."

His tone was an accusation. "He doesn't have to stay in bed," I pointed out grimly. "We've got Jigger out there hoping for advance notice, but this boy has fooled a lot smarter people than Jigger." I watched while the thin beam of the flashlight probed restlessly at a corner of the workroom and came to rest upon the thin roll of a mattress pad. "Do you want to call it off?" I asked harshly.

"You're the thinkin' man, chief. Everyone knows I'm just the muscle in this outfit." Tony's mocking tone grated. "From my wife I get it now. Brains I should have, like Mickey. That's what I get with my pasta. Brains I heard nothin' about when I was courtin' her on her old lady's livin' room couch. I'm not —"

"I asked you if you want to call it off."

"Hell, man, d' you blame me?" Tony's tone was defensive. "It's not like we were sent here. How long d' you think we can keep the lid on? Bronson's plenty itchy. He wants us out've here. An' this character don't show. He must have our action taped."

"He can't have it taped." I tried to put all the weight of my conviction into my lowered tone. "He's just being careful since he cashed in the watchman on the Merivale job. He'll bite on this. Didn't we tailor-

make it for him?"

Tony's grunt was noncommittal. He walked to the corner and picked up the mattress roll, then in three long strides disappeared with it through the shadow of the hanging curtain. I could hear the slight scraping sounds as he unrolled the mattress pad behind the counter inside the shop.

TONY WAS ALWAYS LIKE THIS ON A STAKEOUT, I REMINDED myself. It wasn't nerves. Tony had no nerves, because he had no imagination. It was the inactivity that galled him. He didn't mind losing an equivalent amount of sleep, but only in what he considered a better cause.

It had been a joke at first that night at Tony's apartment when Louise, listening to us butt our heads together in frustration about the wave of jewelry store burglaries, had suggested a stakeout. But the second Tony and I looked at each other it jelled. This was the way. So it wasn't authorized. Knock it over on its back and no one would say a word. This was a big one. Did we want to be answering poor-box robbery calls for the rest of our time on the police force?

I settled back upon the uncomfortable watchmaker's bench that made keeping awake no problem. I eased the hot, clinging weight of my shoulder holster, then stretched to work cramped sinews. In the silence I heard a muscle pop.

Louise . . . I felt a warming sensation as my lips formed her name. I could almost see her tall, lithe figure and the cameo-smooth perfection of her ivory features with her brows forming black wings. I shut off the picture hastily.

One thing I had to give Tony: never before had we been this far out on a limb. Sure, we'd cut corners, but always with at least tacit authority. Georgie had a way of looking at the results. But just let Lieutenant George McDonald find Hanrahan and Costanza on an unauthorized stakeout on a case to which we hadn't even been assigned, and he'd burn us right down to the stubble.

I hitched myself uneasily on the stool. Cut it out, I told myself roughly. Nothing's going wrong. What's to go wrong? The trap's baited, and any time now — with just a little bit more patience — you'll spring it.

THE HANGING CURTAIN IN FRONT OF ME SUDDENLY RUSTLED and bulged, and the blood thudded in my ears until I recognized the shape of Tony's head. I snatched my hand away from the grip of my .38 in its holster.

"Boy, you're asking for it!"

"Ahhhh, what's the matter with you?" he demanded impatiently. I heard the sound of him shrugging out of his jacket. It was followed by the muffled thump of his automatic as he put it down on the bench. "Had to get out've that sling," his heavy whisper informed me. "Chafin' the hide off me whenever I moved." There was the subdued squeak of the weapon being removed from the sweaty leather.

Tony continued in a low tone, half-wheedling, half-blustering. "How's about usin' your pad the first night we knock off this lousy detail? I could almost see his grin, sheepishly defiant. "Nothin' more cozy for a married cat than a bachelor partner with his own apartment."

"Louise — " I began.

"The hell with Louise. 'Course, if she found out — " Tony paused. "Deliver me from narrow-minded women. Last time she like to holed me at the waterline." He paused again. "This time it might be worth it. Did I tell you about the department store beef Georgie sent out on the other day? No? Well, I met this really stacked limejuicer in the office there. The works: the accent, an' icicles on her nose when she looks down it. I phoned her a couple times since, an' she hasn't said no. I wanna see what happens to those icicles when I get head-to-head with her."

"How do you expect Louise to put up with — "

"Now don't *you* start tellin' me she's too good for me. I get enough of that from her. I spread my action around where it's appreciated, an' Louise can like it or lump it. You, too, partner. Just tell me yes or no on the apartment."

"Yes."

"That's more like it, partner. Now you're pitchin' a strong game. You're — say! What's today? Tuesday?"

"Wednesday, now."

I could hear Tony slapping at his pockets, and his penlight came on again. "Last time I talked to the limejuicer she gimme a fat hint her birthday's this Friday. I'll bull Bronson into lettin' me have somethin' out've his stock at wholesale. I saw a pin an' earring set in one of the displays the other night — "

The curtain rustled again as Tony disappeared beyond it.

I chewed on my lower lip. I wondered why I'd said yes about the loan of the apartment, and I didn't like the train of thought it generated. Louise — we'd said we were through with that. We'd said we were going to find a better way.

INSIDE THE SHOP I COULD SEE THE QUICKSILVER GLEAM OF Tony's penlight-beam reflected from crystalware and jewelry. I shook my head. Sometimes it seemed that Tony —

And then a light came on inside. I stared in paralyzed disbelief as a single fluorescent ceiling-tube came on and brightened the showroom. My heels slammed hard into the floor as I propelled myself from the stool. Had Tony lost his damn mind?

I reached the curtain in a scrambling slide. Everything was blurred to eyes dilated by darkness. I could see Tony's chunky body at a showcase from which he had whirled to stare blankly at a figure in black mask and dark clothing, standing just inside the opened front door. I could see the gloved right hand still on the light switch and wirecutters in the left hand.

Tony lunged across his chest instinctively for the automatic still lying inside on the watchmaker's bench. Metal glinted darkly as a gun appeared in the black-masked intruder's right hand. In desperation, Tony raised his arm to throw the penlight, his only weapon. The gun in Black Mask's hand cracked twice, blue flame jetting.

Tony's uplifted arm seemed to fall in sections as his knees slackened. A gout of crimson spurted from his forehead as he went over backward to the floor. I burst through the curtain, the gun I didn't remember drawing in my hand. I fired and stumbled over a foot-stool in the same instant Black Mask's arm swung to confront me.

The dark-clothed figure was already backing out the door, but the small-caliber gun snapped viciously. I felt a searing touch my wrist. I rolled over, digging with my knees for leverage. I heard the gun go off again, and the overhead fluorescent tube shattered. The room went dark, twice as dark after the light. Tiny glass particles cascaded floorward in a tinkling shower.

I surged up in a half-crouch in the silence that followed. I sensed that Black Mask was gone. I knew I should be instantly in pursuit, but the way Tony had fallen . . .

I plunged across the floor on hands and knees, below the window level. Glass fragments crunched under me. I could hardly see at all. Then I touched Tony. Frantically I removed the penlight from his relaxed hand, and when it came on the hard little core of light emblazoned the bright splash of blood on the forehead and the crimson, trickling worms on the swarthy, still features.

"Tony!" I said urgently. My hands raced to his heart, pulse, and temple with an increasing sinking sensation. I couldn't feel a thing. I sat back slowly on my heels, my hands shaking.

Tony Costanza was dead.

And Black Mask, who had killed him, was six inches and forty pounds short of measuring up to the only man who should have come through that baited door.

I NEVER KNEW HOW LONG I REMAINED IN MY CRAMPED, heel-sitting position. I straightened awkwardly, finally, my leg muscles almost rigid. I waited for impaired circulation to speed up while my mind still tried to take it all in.

Tony Costanza dead?

It couldn't be.

The swaggering, rough-riding, hard-drinking man; the frosty-eyed, tough-talking, hardbitten cop — Tony dead?

Impossible.

But there among the floor shadows, the darker shadow of Tony's body said that it was true.

My hands knotted tightly. When I found Black Mask, I'd damn well settle up a few scores. I'd — I pulled myself up short. Find Black Mask? I'd never get a chance to look. There wasn't a chance in the world of explaining the situation to Lieutenant George McDonald. Or to anyone else in the department. Mickey Hanrahan would be up on charges so fast I'd never get my breath. And then it would be back to riding a patrol car, if I didn't get busted out completely.

I drew a long, quivering breath. Where had it gone wrong? It *had* to be the man we'd been looking for. Was I sure of what I'd seen? It had been all action and movement. The killer had been masked. Was I *sure* it wasn't the right man?

Call up, I prodded myself.

Call Jigger.

If it's the right man, maybe there's still a chance.

I HURRIED TO THE TELEPHONE ON THE WATCHMAKER'S bench inside the curtain. A faint hope burgeoned as I dialed. Hope, and the beginning of anger.

If Jigger had fallen asleep . . .

If our man had slipped past him . . .

The click came in the middle of the first ring. "Yeah? Who is it?" Jigger's hoarsened voice, souvenir of an elbow in the throat during a street fight, was unmistakable. My grip on the receiver slackened. Jigger hadn't been asleep.

I had to clear my throat before I could find my voice. "It's Hanrahan."

"Oh, yeah, boss. We knockin' off, I hope?"

I circled dry lips with the tip of my tongue. "Anything new on your end?"

"Not a thing, boss. Your boy's never even rolled over since he tucked it into the quilts at eleven thirty."

So it hadn't been the man we'd been watching, which meant it could have been anyone. Even if I had a chance to go after him, I'd be looking for a masked man I'd be unable to recognize. A masked man who had had a damn good look at me.

Frustration bubbled within me. Come on, I jibed at myself. Was I going to lie down and roll over for this? Get yourself in gear, man.

"Hold on a minute, Jigger," I said. I turned my head and spoke away from the mouthpiece. "What'd you say, Tony?" I backed away and deepened my voice, a palm partly covering the mouthpiece. "Tell the little wart I want to see him tomorrow." I leaned back into the phone. "Tony says —"

"I heard him, boss." The rasping voice was respectful. "Tell him I'll be at the usual place."

"We're leaving now."

I stared down at the replaced phone, conscious that my lips were drawn back from my teeth.

Well, Hanrahan? You've made up your mind already? That's quick work. Your partner's turning cold on the floor inside because of your stupidity, but you're already building bridges to get out from under. You're a nice guy, Hanrahan. You'll go far.

Ahhhh, stop it, you fool, I told myself sharply. So we'd been waiting for the wrong man, and Tony had been killed. It could have been me. Would it do anyone any good if I sat down and waited to get struck by the official lightning?

The fermenting brew in my mind drove me from the workbench out into the shop again.

I came to a dead stop.

Louise!

I winced at the thought of her. For weeks I'd carefully compartmented Tony and Louise in my thinking. Tony was my partner. Louise was — well . . .

What was I going to do about Louise? She knew where we were, and why. When the official knock came on her apartment door, if she spoke incautiously, it would put the lid on any covering up Mickey Hanrahan hoped to do.

I STOOD FOR A MOMENT, LISTENING TO MY OWN BREATHING. It was simple, really. I had to talk to her first. I couldn't turn a wheel

until I knew what Louise Constanza's reaction would be.

I returned to the telephone and stood beside it.

What are you worrying about, Hanrahan? You know what her reaction will be. She'll back you up all the way. No, that's not good enough. You only think you know. Go on, pick up the phone. How much time do you think you have? You're a big boy now. Pick up the phone and tell her. If you're looking for an easy way, there isn't any.

I grabbed at the phone with an animal sound, then dialed furiously with a stabbing forefinger. The phone rang four times before Louise's sleepy "hello" came faintly from the depths of slumber. Little nerve prickles ran through me at the sound of the warm, drowsy voice.

"Louise — " I said strongly, and then my throat closed up.

"Mickey? It is you?" Her voice was stronger. "Why are you calling at this time of night?"

I tried again. "Louise — " I pushed my face into the mouthpiece. "Tony — "

I could hear the hissing intake of her breath. "Tony? He's — hurt?" She continued on before I could speak, every drop of emotion squeezed from her voice. "You'd never have called if he was hurt. He's dead, isn't he?"

"He — " I tried to think of some other way to say it. "Yes." The silence built up for so long I was afraid she had fainted. "Louise!"

"I'm here. Did you kill him, Mickey?"

Anger flared from my hair to the soles of my feet. "No, goddammit, I didn't! Don't talk foolishness!"

"You're sure? When we talked about finding a way — "

"Will you start making sense? It was the stakeout." I gestured at my surroundings. "It went wrong."

"Please God you're telling me the truth. Ohhhh, I can't *think*! What are you going to *do*?"

"I'm going to take him out of here."

The line hummed emptily in my ear for an instant. "I don't — you're going to do what?"

My nerve-ends were jangling at her slowness. "I'll try to set up something on the outside so no one can point a finger at me."

Her slow exhalation whispered in my ear. "Why?"

Exasperation overwhelmed me. "So I can save my damn job, that's why! Maybe my life, if other people think like you do! Do you realize the spot I'm in here? Or maybe you think I should put my .38 in my mouth and even things up?"

"Don't talk like that, Mickey." Her voice was much stronger. "Are you sure it's the thing to do?"

"No, I'm not sure. But I'm damn sure if I stay here my ass has had the course."

"What can I do to help?"

I swallowed a sigh of relief. "They'll be knocking on your door. Watch yourself. Watch what you say. You don't know anything about where we were." A thought crossed my mind. "What we were talking about Sunday — your getting a divorce? You didn't mention it to anyone, did you?"

"No. I haven't had —"

"Then don't," I interrupted her. "Someone might think —"

"That I killed Tony?"

It startled me. "You? Hell, no!"

"Someone might."

"They're far more likely to think it's me. Listen, I've got to get out of here, right now."

"P-lease be c-careful, Mickey." I could hear her crying. "I'm just beginning to realize. *Please* be careful!"

"You know it." The forlorn note in her voice made me ache for her. "Hold tight, now. We'll ride it out." I hung up.

So there's your passport, Hanrahan. She'll handle them when they come to her door. That's an all-purpose woman. Who should know better than you? Now get started on what you have to do.

I had a sudden, sharp picture of the full-bodied Louise lying wide-eyed in bed in the silent apartment. A lot depended upon her nerve. In the first moment of shock I'd only had time to think about saving my job. If anyone found out about us, it could come down to saving my neck, or hers.

I had to get the body out into the car and then set up something to make it look like we'd run into something unexpected on the street. It might work or it might not, but at least it was a chance.

Louise had asked me if I'd killed Tony. I'd already been thinking about the stocky, black-masked gunman who had entered the jewelry shop. Had it been a small man? Or a tall, full-bodied woman?

Stop it, man.

That way lies disaster.

Get moving. You've got a job to do. You've got —

A SCRATCHY SOUND FROM INSIDE THE SHOWROOM BRISTLED the hair on the back of my neck and produced my automatic in my hand without my even thinking about it. I approached the curtain stealthily. Gun at the ready, I beamed Tony's penlight around the four corners of the room.

The beam lingered on the corner near the showcases, then froze.
I stopped breathing.

Tony Costanza was sitting up in front of the showcase.

A bloody-faced Tony Costanza was staring into the light. "That you, Mickey?" he asked hoarsely. "Man, what a headache! Feels like that shot lifted a flap off the front of my forehead. Did you get the bastard?"

My hands were shaking worse than when I had been unable to find a pulse or heartbeat on him. "N-no." Leaden-footed, I approached him where he still sat on the floor.

He brushed at the blood obscuring his vision, then looked at his hand. "Were we right?" he asked. "Was it the right guy?"

"No. I was wrong." *Kill him now*, the inner voices said. *Kill him. He's already dead in your mind. He's already dead in Louise's mind.*

Tony was heaving himself shakily to his feet. "Can't win 'em all," he said. "We'll just have to try somethin' else. But first we're goin' after this buzzard." He started for the workroom, weaving a little. "I'll get the first aid kit from the car so you can patch me up. No use scarin' Louise."

My .38 was lined up on his broad back as he went through the curtain.

Then I lowered it and returned it to its holster.

There had to be a better way.

I had to call Louise and tell her it had been a mistake.

We had a reprieve straight out of hell.

Reassessments could wait.

Survival and sex were two of the strongest instincts of mankind. The strongest was survival, but not by much.

I headed for the telephone.

I wasn't a better man for what had happened during the last few moments, but I was a different man.

Louise — and the police department — would have to settle for that. ●

"There's not much to do here in the Garden, so both Eve and I get our kicks from reading MSMM. That red-headed Miami private eye is really something. I'd like to be just like him. But where would I get clients?"

— Adam, first male MSMM fan

*Somebody wanted him dead in the worst way — and
that's the way he got it!*

The Murder of Mr. Excitement

by MICHAEL AVALLONE

I WAS BACKSTAGE AT THE *DOVER THEATRE* TRYING TO HELP Captain Michael Monks of Homicide solve a murder. One of the newsiest and most celebrated of his long career with the New York Police Department.

The Tan Hat Man had been running on Broadway for three hit months when a pistol shot sounded like a cough during the middle of Act Two and leading man Walter Wiley pitched off the apron of the stage into the orchestra pit — dead. That's a long sentence but it gives some idea of the length of Walter Wiley's hold on the public. Also, there hadn't been a murder in a playhouse since Lincoln.

Not even the hastily-struck overture by the baffled musicians could drown out the screams of a terrified matinee audience. Theatre parties and vacationing matrons from the Coast and Mid-West had packed the plush seats of the *Dover*. The death of Walter Wiley stunned the entertainment world. Or so the Manhattan tabloids blared. Broadway's Mr. Excitement — the singing, dancing sensation known as Walter Wiley had been strangely, inexplicably murdered. I'm quoting again.

Like the assassination of Honest Abe, an unknown killer had struck from the audience. But the cops didn't even have a John Wilkes Booth to contend with. Walter Wiley's murderer remained Nobody for three whole days while the official police machinery rolled. Producer David Merrick fumed, but kept on selling tickets for *The Tan Hat Man*. He

would re-open when Monks found the murderer.

"A theatre crowd of fifteen hundred people," Monks groaned at me over a bottle of pop. "Might just as well have been Yankee Stadium."

"Take it easy," I said. "It's not as bad as all that."

Monks' smile was sheer irony. "No? Pray tell us more. I'm not using your private crystal ball, Noon."

"Since when did you let numbers bother you? Fifteen hundred customers. So what? You can whittle that down."

"I'm still listening, Noon."

"Okay. Wiley was killed with a .22. Through the heart. Front and center. A perfect shot under any conditions. Knowing what you know about .22's, you can eliminate the mezzanine and second balcony. The distance is too great."

Monks scowled and put the empty pop bottle down behind one of the flats that was designed to represent a Manhattan skyline. "Go on."

"Also, you couldn't shoot a man onstage from a sitting position. Not in a packed house with someone sitting in front of you. Wiley was center stage when he fell. He hadn't moved for a good two minutes before the shot. I know this show. Saw it last month and remember the stage business. Wiley was singing *The Tan Hat Man*. You know — where he stands still marking time like a soldier with a cane slung over his shoulder. So you know he was shot while he was standing there facing his adoring public."

"So?"

"So the killer stood up in the dark to fire. And since from the standpoint of range, we eliminate the last twenty rows of the orchestra section — at least twenty — I'd say your killer had to be placed somewhere from Rows A to D. Or E."

MONKS NOW REGARDED ME WITH ALMOST A DETACHED AIR. Too often my meandering led somewhere. Since he had long ago decided to allow a private detective the greatest of latitudes in Headquarters affairs, he knew this could be another of those times.

"All right, Ed. What about the musicians? Remember them? The pit would place them right in front of Wiley."

"No good, Mike. The killer would have been seen. Also, he would have had to fire *up*. A Broadway orchestra is always *below* stage level. The trajectory of the slug in Wiley's heart showed the barest angle of entry. Far too gradual for a shot from the pit. The bullet had to come from Row A on."

Monks sighed. "Okay. So you like that location. So we checked all the ticket holders in that area. So we found out it was a high-priced

theatre party from Rhode Island. So we found no one with a motive for killing a Broadway star. For most of them, it was the first time they'd seen the great Wiley. So what?"

I took a memo pad out of my coat. Once Monks had given me the go-ahead on his murder case, I'd done a little snooping.

"I've checked the stagehands, ushers and candy concession crowd. Also the doormen and porters. And a guy named Terrini who's Head Electrician. Seems he roams the whole building, front and back, while the show is on, to make sure things run smoothly during a performance. Ever since the first rehearsals and tryouts, *The Tan Hat Man* has been one big happy family. No bad blood in any department."

"Terrini wears glasses thicker than milk bottles," Monks grumbled. "And has double vision to boot. I ruled him out, on your theory, the first time I talked to him. And the rest of them —"

I read aloud from my list. "Porters: Jess Tompkins, Harry Lee, Sam Patterson. All blacks. They live in Manhattan, are all married and wouldn't have been inside the theatre proper while the show was on. It isn't permitted. Now the ushers downstairs are Mary Williams, Ada Perkins and Louisa Jones. They are all middle-aged dolls, been working the *Dover* for years and from my viewpoint have a hard enough time handling their flashlights let alone a .22. The candy concession and cloakroom boys are Tom Manhattan, Ed Fairlow and an executive type named Guba who runs the stand. They all can move around willy-nilly once the curtain goes up. Manhattan and Fairlow, like most people who work these jobs, are aspiring actors, making a few bucks working Broadway shows as candy butchers and such. Of course, there's more ushers and suspects upstairs but counting on the angle about the .22 and the range, I rule them out."

Monks showed his teeth. "Don't remind me. We've been all over your list. If you're trying to tell me I'm a long way off from home, I agree with you."

"No, Michael." I smiled, putting the memo pad away. "With the means of killing fairly well fixed in our minds and ruling out the greater part of the audience the way we have and finding the .22 buried in a sand urn in the Men's Room, I'd say you had a good chance. Fact is, I've narrowed the list of suspects down to two."

"Noon, if you don't stop acting like a television dick, I swear I'll never invite you in on a Homicide again. You can't possibly have spotted something Headquarters hasn't. This place has been gone over with a fine tooth comb —"

I held up a restraining hand, sensing one of his lectures.

"The advantages of my racket, Michael, is that I don't have anyone

to answer to like you have. No pressure. I *did* see something you didn't."

"What for God's sakes?"

"Give me five minutes to try something?"

MONKS STARTED TO SAY SOMETHING THEN SHRUGGED. THE Bickford shrug. The one that almost dislocates his shoulders. He always gave me my head when the chips were down. I walked to the dimness of Stage Left and said what I had to say to the policeman on duty there. Monks watched, the scowl on his face deepening. For three days, the *Dover* had been staked out for surveillance and examination and for three days, all the people who had been on duty, including the cast, reported for work just as if the show was still running. The cast had been excluded from my pet theory—almost from the first moment I had learned the direction of the .22 bullet that had found Walter Wiley's glorious heart.

Almost immediately, two men in maroon uniforms emerged from the gloom of Stage Left. The cop took up his position again.

Men. They were boys. Tousled-haired, defiantly young. Over the breastpocket of each uniform was proclaimed, in golden thread, the sponsorship of the *Dover Theatre*.

"This won't take long, fellows," I said cheerily. "Captain Monks, these are two of the ushers. Tom Manhattan and Ed Fairlow. They're actors, of course, but they earn their living working theatres like the *Dover* between jobs. Before that first Big Break."

The ushers grinned at that, sheepishly chuckling. But they both looked uncomfortable. I was counting on that too.

Monks smiled a sour greeting and beetled his brows at me. I nodded and got down to business. Monks was never long a patience.

"Tom," I said suddenly. "Wiley's dead now so there's no use hiding your star under a bushel. Everybody knows you write a lot. Plays, stories."

Tom Manhattan blinked. He was thin, nervous and handsome in a helpless, petulant way. "I don't get you, Mister."

I tried to look sympathetic. "I've been talking around to people in the business. You know — places like Downey's and the Theatre Bar. And everyone backstage knows the secret, too. Common knowledge, you might say. I know this show is yours — the idea for it, I mean. You were foolish enough to give Walter Wiley the whole plot one night in Downey's. You thought his name and rep would help you sell it. It did but not the way you wanted it. He stole the whole idea for himself

and got it going before you could holler foul to Equity. With his own writer."

Manhattan shook his head. "You're putting me on, Mister. Me and this show —?"

"Is it so crazy?" I asked quietly. "Manhattan." I spelled it. "M-A-N-H-A-T-T-A-N." I smiled at the other boy. "Go ahead, Fairlow. Tell him what you told me."

"Me?" Fairlow was shorter and heavier than Manhattan. He jumped as if I'd thrust a live snake into his face. "Why I never —"

"Fink!" Tom Manhattan shrilled, leaping for his partner. "You promised me on your mother's grave you wouldn't talk! You crummy dirty fink —" He went for Fairlow, arms pumping, fists balled. Fairlow fell back in amazement.

Before Manhattan could reach him, I stepped in, chopping a Judo blow to the boy's stomach. Manhattan collapsed, staggered off from his partner and would have lurched off the apron of the stage but Monk's alert cop on duty grabbed him in time.

"Take it easy, kid," I said softly. "Sit down and make your statement. The Captain will be listening."

Mike Monks listened, now without awe, as Tom Manhattan confessed to the murder of Walter Wiley. The motive had been revenge; the emotion one of pure Show Biz hatred for a man who had robbed an aspiring actor's mind of an idea for a hit show and then reneged on the payoff. It's happened before and I guess it will happen again when Ego is the dividing line between Comedy and Tragedy.

AFTER TOM MANHATTAN HAD BEEN LED AWAY IN SHINING handcuffs with a bewildered Ed Fairlow in tow, Monks really gave me a pop-eyed once-over.

"Would you mind telling me how you pulled that bluff off? I've seen you in action a million times, Ed, but that was the biggest rabbit of them all."

"Was it?"

"Damn tooting. You didn't give him a shred of incriminating evidence and he folded. Come on — what was the trick?"

"No bluff, Mike. I told you about the location and the seating arrangement. The killing had to be performed by someone standing up. So who would be less noticeable than an usher who's always on his feet and always in a darkened aisle?"

"All right, all right. I buy that much. But Manhattan wasn't the only usher. What about the lady ushers? Why did you concentrate on him?"

I took out my Camels and unsaddled one.

"I told you. Those dames are all old and I couldn't see them wandering into the Men's Room to bury the .22 in a sand urn."

"Still not enough. What about Fairlow? And where did you get that junk about the show — stealing the idea and all —?"

"Tom Manhattan himself," I said. "Or else there is no argument for coincidence. His funny name. Why do you think I spelled it out for him?"

"Edward Noon," Captain Michael Monks said officially. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"*The Tan Hat Man*," I said. "A demonstration of pure effective Ego. Actors are all would-be writers, anyway. And vice versa. I've never known an actor who didn't think he was capable of writing fiction or plays or anything."

"Noon —" Monks rumbled warningly.

"Manhattan," I smiled thinly. "*The Tan Hat Man*. It's an anagram, Mike, and a personal signature if there ever was one. *Man-hat-tan . . . tan-hat-man . . .*"

"Ouch," Monks groaned.

"That's what Walter Wiley must have said when that .22 slug hit him on stage."

THAT WAS ALL THERE REALLY WAS TO THE MURDER OF MR. Excitement. Death in the afternoon for the wholesome heart throb of generations of married women, spinsters and divorcees. It had all come to a sensational finale with a tiny leaden pellet of .22 calibre lead. According to some other un-nice things that Monks and his boys found out about Mr. Walter Wiley's peccadilloes, he had had a date with that slug for a long, long time.

The curtain hadn't been rung down on a Star.

The set had been struck on a Number One Heel.

But in the best tradition of Show Biz, *The Tan Hat Man* opened again two weeks after Tom Manhattan was booked for a lifetime performance in Ossining, New York. The show did a bonanza box-office business, helped by the headlines and augmented by the presence of another star of the first magnitude. Hollywood's own Victor Vining.

They tell me *The Tan Hat Man* will be a movie in a couple of years. The Coast bought the screen rights for two million bucks.

That *really* is Show Biz.



Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS

by JOHN BALL

For many years it has been agreed that the two best books of spy stories ever written were *Ashenden, the British Agent* by Somerset Maugham and *Game Without Rules* by Michael Gilbert. This latter work featured the activities of three senior British intelligence agents of peerless ability: Calder, Behrens, and Rasselas. Every page was a sheer delight. Now we have a much awaited sequel which is just as good as the original and, what is more, Rasselas, whose death was erroneously reported in the final chapter of *Game Without Rules*, is back with us again.

Michael Gilbert writes with such a simple flowing style it may deceive many readers into believing that it is easy. It is not; Mr. Gilbert, who is a practicing attorney, is a past master at the crime writing art; there is no one any better anywhere. So run, do not walk, to your nearest bookstore and get your copy of *Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens* while it is still on the shelf. (Why Agent Rasselas failed to make the title is a mystery: possibly gross discrimination on the part of the publisher simply because he is a dog. Only Moritz, the thinking dog, who appears in Eliot Paul's *Fracas in the Foothills* is his possibly equal.) (Harper and Row \$12.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Next in line for top honors this month is *Honor Bound*, by Richard Harris. The author, who is widely known for his work in *The New Yorker*, has turned in a job of suspense writing so cleverly complex that you would have to put a hinge on a snake to follow all of the devious

twists of the plot. A New York attorney comes to the defense of a deceased associate, a father figure to him, who was unjustly accused of a homosexual murder. In an effort to clear his friend's name, and incidentally preserve his own, the protagonist tangles with an utterly ruthless attorney, a completely vicious woman, plus a very strange and different killer. It is customary to say that the ending cannot be foreseen; in this case Mr. Harris has pulled what very well may be a totally new kind of rabbit out of the hat. Nobody, we suspect, is going to guess this one. A very superior piece of writing definitely not to be missed. (St. Martin's Marek, \$12.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Much praise has been lavished on a work called *Chiefs* by Stuart Woods. It was not covered here because no review copy of the hard-cover edition was received from Norton, the publishers. Now Bantam has it out in paperback, more than 400 pages of very small type, but the story is just as good as it was advertised to be. If your eyes are up to it, you'll definitely want to read this. It's a fresh twist on the familiar three generations story and very well done indeed. (Bantam, \$3.75)

☆ ☆ ☆

A good espionage story is usually excellent entertainment, but the theme of a mole high up in British intelligence is beginning to get a little thin, particularly since John LeCarre did such a fine job of it in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*. The idea surfaces once more in Palma Harcourt's new work *A Turn of Traitors*. A British bridegroom to be discovers that his father is a notorious traitor living in Moscow after defecting to the communists. When the news comes through that the older man is dying, British intelligence tries to enlist his son to pay him a final visit to receive any possible repentant message. The son refuses, but then the Russians trick him into doing precisely the same thing. The book is well written and contains some nicely worked out details concerning the high up mole, but the thought keeps coming to mind that LeCarre did it better. (Scribner's, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Duff Hart-Davis attracted some very good notice a little while back with his work *The Heights of Rimming*. Now he has a new entry called *Level Five* which is a different idea that combines adventure with a measure of espionage. A British diving team is engaged to go down into a deep flooded mine once used by the Nazis as a treasure storehouse. The site is near to iron curtain and the expedition is clearly hazardous. As the team descends into the mine there is plenty of tension right up to the moment that something goes wrong. The lead

diver wakes up in a hospital — on the wrong side of the border. His efforts to escape and to return to finish the shadowy job on which he was engaged is something new and different. The ending is not very much of a surprise; most experienced readers will see it coming for some time ahead, but the work is good entertainment anyway. (Atheneum, \$13.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Escape from Berlin at the end of the war is the theme of *The Green Frontier* by John Buxton Hilton, despite the fact that the time of the story is the present. When a foreign Lutheran pastor is arrested in England for a minor offense, he demands that Superintendent Kenworthy handle his case. This is refused, particularly since Kenworthy has retired. But when the pastor is killed, Kenworthy is called back and a story based on his past experiences in wartime intelligence is unfolded. This is a well written work which is enjoyable without necessarily creating a long lasting impression. (St. Martin's, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

After reading *Murder at Moose Jaw* we were impatient to meet the next work from author Tim Heald and his Simon Bognor, investigator for the British Board of Trade. Mr. Bognor enjoys the mild contempt of his associates and a firm reputation for ineptitude. This is certainly demonstrated when he keeps meeting fascinating women and does nothing about it on each occasion. (He is married and somehow remains loyal to his wife.) Mr. Bognor has returned in *A Small Masterpiece* which takes him onto the campus of Oxford University. Most American readers won't understand the academic language used and for that reason the story is not as engaging as Mr. Bognor's Canadian experience, which is still recommended for its good if chaste fun. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

True crime enthusiasts will be much interested in Albert Borowitz' *A Gallery of Sinister Perspectives*, which is sub-titled Ten Crimes and a Scandal. This is a very well done work that casts significant light on some celebrated cases as well as the disagreement at the Garrick Club between Charler Dickens and William Thackeray. This alone is worth the price of the engaging book, which is likely to become a standard work in its field. Firmly recommended. (Kent State University Press, Kent, Ohio 44242. \$14.95 in hardback, \$5.75 in paper.)

☆ ☆ ☆

Fans of the private eye story will be glad to know that the fanzine *The Not So Private Eye* has been revived after a two year lapse. It's \$2.00 from Andy Jaysnovitch 6 Dana Estates Drive, Parlin, NJ 08859.

*Rose had a secret. And she wouldn't tell it to anybody.
Ever!*

Morning Song

by BETTY REN WRIGHT

THE SONG BLEW INTO HER MIND UNEXPECTEDLY, LIKE HOT September wind, bringing with it the smell of the kindergarten room and the feel of her plastic nap-pack warmed by the sun. She closed her eyes and pretended she was lying on the nap-pack right now, and she sang the song in a very small voice, hoping no one else would hear:

“Good morning to you,
Good morning to you.
We're all in our places
With bright shining faces.
Good morning to you,
Good morning to you.”

The first day of school, Rose thought, they had learned that song the very first day. Where were the red-checked dress and white pinafore she had worn that morning? Home in the closet, probably; her mama hadn't packed any of the clothes she liked best when she sent her to this place. Rose remembered fingering the smocking on the front of the

dress when Miss Williams called her name and made her stand up. Later, Miss Williams had taken off the pinafore and hung it up so it wouldn't get dirty when she played with her new friends.

All my new friends, she thought proudly, though of course they hadn't been ready to be her friends at first. They giggled because she was the only one wearing a dress, and her heart sank since she knew there were no jeans in her closet at home, just a long row of pink and red and yellow and blue dresses. They snickered because she was afraid of the teeter-totter on the playground, afraid of the slide, even afraid to play in the sandbox because sometimes naughty children threw sand. Until that first day at school she had played only with her mama, rising and falling gently on the tiny backyard teeter-totter, swinging decorously on the red plastic swing, never far from her mama's arms.

"Hey, she's singing!" A voice broke harshly into her memories. "I wouldn't believe it if I didn't hear it."

Rose clamped her lips over the third "good morning" and finished the song inside her head. She told herself she didn't care what the people here said. The song filled her with a kind of joy, as if all the happy times at school were locked up in those few short lines. Gradually, because Miss Williams had insisted, her classmates had stopped teasing her about her dainty, always-perfect clothes. During storytime she drifted with the magic of Miss Williams' voice into a land where she had a father as well as a mama. She was a princess in that land, and she had fourteen brothers and sisters, and they played together all day every day. They wore what they wanted and they never worried about being sick and they all went to the summer camp where Miss Williams was a counselor, and they went swimming and climbed trees and never had to ask permission because they were all princes and princesses and could do as they pleased.

ONCE SHE TOLD HER MAMA ABOUT THAT MAGIC LAND, BUT IT had been a mistake. She remembered a stinging slap that spun her across the room, then the comforting mother-arms around her soothing away the shock and pain.

"It's only that I hate to see you drawing away from me," her mama had said. "My darling, perfect little girl. Don't ever stop being my sweet baby, will you?"

Rose had promised. She tried very hard to drop a curtain over the magic land and all the happiness there. It was enough to be in school — to stand in a corner of the playground watching the squealing shouting others and know she might someday be part of them and they

a part of her. If she did think about the magic land, she was careful not to talk about it at home. She never mentioned Miss Williams either, after the first bad time when she said, "I really love Miss Williams," and her mama's face had turned pale and cold like the face of an angel in a painting. It was two days before her mother would talk to her again, and even though things were as they had been after that, Rose never forgot those terrible two days.

"I just don't want outsiders coming between us, dear," her mother had said, finally. "I love you so much. You and I don't need anyone else."

ROSE THOUGHT ABOUT THAT NOW, UNTIL FOOTSTEPS IN THE hallway told her the man was coming to see her again.

Good morning to you . . .

He was a nice man, and he came to see Rose at this place quite often. She never looked at him, just hugged her doll and said nothing, but she knew he was a nice man. The only trouble was that he was full of questions.

"You look different today, Rose. How do you feel?"

Don't look up. Don't talk. Nothing to say.

"I have a feeling you're remembering today, Rose. Am I right? What are you remembering?"

She touched her doll's painted-on fingernails and waited. He never stayed very long. When he was gone she would think about Miss Williams for a while and the day she had said there was Someone who could help Rose stop being afraid.

"Are you thinking about school today, Rose? Are you remembering things that happened at school?"

Good morning to you! The song shrieked through her head. She looked up for just a second, startled, wondering if the man had heard it, too.

"That's a good girl, Rose. You *are* feeling better today. Tell me what you're thinking about."

She dropped her head and began to rock her doll.

"She was singing this morning," a voice said. "I heard her."

The man sighed. He reached out and took Rose's hand. "We'll talk again tomorrow," he said. "Maybe tomorrow you'll tell me about school."

WHEN SHE WAS ALONE, SHE LAID HER DOLL GENTLY ON THE bed and covered it with a towel. The doll had yellow hair like Miss

Williams', but there was no blood on her bright shining face. *We're all in our places*, the song echoed in her head, and Miss Williams' place had been at the bottom of the school stairs, lying there like a doll somebody had dropped. Rose saw herself standing beside poor Miss Williams, screaming and screaming till the janitor came and then the fourth-grade teacher who was working late. They called an ambulance and Miss Williams was carried away, and the fourth-grade teacher cried. For a while no one noticed Rose at all. When they did remember her, she had already forgotten most of what had happened. It was just there, a shadow behind a curtain, like the magic land her mama had told her not to talk about. And no one but the man here at the hospital asked her to talk about it. She had never told anyone in the whole world that just before the fall her mama had been standing at the top of the stairs with Miss Williams talking talking talking. Pushing. No one else knew. No one else saw. It was a secret forever.

"Here comes your mother, silly baby," said a voice. It was a mean, jealous voice. No one else's mother came every single day.

Rose stood up. She ran to the door and into her mother's arms, as she always did. She bent down to sniff her mama's elegant scent. Her mama held her a moment and then pushed her away.

"You're going to ruin my dress, darling," she said. "Now, tell me how you are feeling today."

Rose hunched a little so she could look straight into her mama's eyes. "We're all in our places with bright shining faces," she sang happily. She had never sung for her mama before. ●



G-MEN ^{U.S.} THE BLACK DRAGON

Rod CAMERON Roland GOTZ
Constance WORTH
Nino PIPITONE



A REPUBLIC SERIAL
IN 15 CHAPTERS

Steiner was dead, and there were some people who thought this was as it should be. The eulogy was understandably short.

Community Effort

by WADE MOSBY

NOBODY, BUT NOBODY, WORKED HARDER AT BEING AN arrogant boor than Philip Steiner III ("call me Phil"), who rode around town in a ragtop Jag (nobody could remember seeing the top up), his stringy hair flapping in the wind and his hi-fi stereo at max volume.

Steiner had a regular box at the baseball park, was overbearingly egocentric at cocktail parties and attended all of the county Republican meetings, although he was never invited. Thanks to an industrious father, he had more money than he could spend. But even so, he refused to contribute to the Community Fund, on grounds that the poor didn't know how to handle money.

The truth was that Steiner could have funded all of the city's

charities for a year if he had just offered his backside as a target in a kicking contest, at about a dollar a-kick.

Steiner occasionally sensed that people disliked him, but, being unfamiliar with human insights, he paid no attention to his own. Steiner was handsome, in his own way. His regular features, too early criss-crossed with lines etched by alcohol and varnished by sun and wind, gave him a devilish mask that appealed to some women.

His wife, Carrie, had long since ceased to care. Steiner did as he pleased, and it pleased him to see how many young women in the community he could defoliate. Carrie's only feeling toward him was dull hatred. She wanted to end the marriage, but her attorney — who was on Steiner's payroll — advised against it.

Thus there was shock, but no deep feeling of community loss, when Steiner and his Jag were found at the bottom of a steep embankment early one morning. Both were quite beyond repair.

DEPUTY GERALD HUBER REPORTED TO HIS OFFICE THAT HE had come upon the wreckage, one headlight still shining crazily into the leaves above it and the radio still blaring rock 'n' roll music on an all-night FM station.

The coroner, Cassius Skates, was awakened by the phone, and after listening to a briefed-down version of Huber's report, quickly dressed, checked his medical bag and drove to the scene.

Huber was still there, and waved Skates to the shoulder behind his squad car.

"Sorry to get you out, Cass. It's Phil Steiner. I think he's dead."

Skates was a general practitioner who didn't particularly relish being coroner, especially in cases like this one, but he resolutely picked his way down the rocky hillside. No point in breaking an ankle.

He could hardly recognize Steiner's gaunt features through the multiple lacerations. The music distracted him, and he switched off the radio and the ignition. Huber should have done that. He examined Steiner's eyes with his flashlight, and put his fingers to his neck. There was a faint pulse. Skates hesitated for a moment, then scurried back up the hill for his medical kit.

"Dead, ain't he, Doc?" Huber asked.

"I'm not sure," Skates replied. "Stay here, Jerry, and keep the other zanies from coming down on my head."

Doc got back to Steiner, fussed over him for a few minutes, then slowly closed his bag and climbed back up the hill.

"He's dead," he said to Huber.

An ambulance pulled up.

"No sweat," Huber said to the driver. "Guy's dead. Phil Steiner. Don't know what we'll do for rock 'n' roll music around here, now."

The attendants laughed.

"Take him to the morgue," Doc said. "I'll want another look in the morning. But it's fairly obvious what happened. I'm not going to suggest an inquest."

"Should I tell his wife, Cass?" Huber asked.

"No need. I'll tell her. She's one of my patients."

CASS SKATES MULLED OVER WHAT HE HAD SEEN AS HE drove home. Steiner undoubtedly was boozed up, but he often was and still was able to drive. Fast. If he had mixed booze with drugs, for instance one of the benzodiazepines, he would have been in a stupor.

Steiner wasn't a junkie, but tranquilizers were easy enough to get. Must be a bushel of 'em prescribed every year in the county.

Carrie answered her telephone on the second ring.

"This is Cass Skates, Carrie. I'm afraid I have some bad news. About Philip. He had an accident in his car and, yes . . . he's gone. Nothing could be done for him . . . Are you OK? . . . Well, don't hesitate to call. Good night."

He wondered if she had any tranquilizers from her last prescription. Probably wouldn't need any more, with that son of a bitch out of her life.

THE FUNERAL OF PHILIP STEINER III WAS NOT ONE OF THE major social events of the season. Carrie, his parents, a handful of other relatives and Cassius Skates were there. Deputy Huber, who had been assigned to escort the procession to the cemetery, was in a back pew.

The eulogy was short, even though Father Gilligan had spent the last two days trying to think of nice things to say about the departed soul (whose contributions to the church made the widow's mite look lavish). But what with music and passages from the Scriptures, it was a respectable sendoff . . .

"He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul . . ."

CARRIE STEINER, SOMEHOW MANAGING TO LOOK CHIC IN A dark suit and veil, kept her head bowed . . . It's odd, she told herself, but I feel no remorse. I feel nothing. Maybe relief, that's what I feel. Like I've been led beside still waters.

I tried to understand Phil and his drinking. And his women. I even tried after he struck me with his fist the first time. He was drunk. But

he usually was, when he was with me. And then he'd get in that car and go tomcatting. He thought he had it made when I started making his drinks for him. He became accustomed to it. He didn't notice when I started adding a new ingredient. I wonder if Doc Skates really knows how much his pills helped me?

Am I a murderer? Murderess? . . . I don't even care. Maybe I should get a medal. I'm not going to worry about it . . .

Father Gilligan was still reading from the Bible . . .

" 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...' "

IN HIS REAR PEW, DEPUTY HUBER THOUGHT IT WAS IRONIC that the priest would mention valleys. That was some valley Steiner rode into. Bastard never would walk any place. He was out so cold in that Jaguar when I found him that I couldn't slap him awake. Maybe I should have hauled him off to the jail . . . But, no . . . he would have gotten off . . . Steiner money . . . Sonbitch didn't even care that he got my daughter in trouble, didn't know of the agony she went through after her visit to that quack abortionist he sent her to . . . No, I did the right thing. Just pushed good old Phil and his Jag over the edge into the "valley of the shadow of death." That makes me a murderer, I guess. Hell, I should get a medal . . .

CASS SKATES AND HIS WIFE SAT DIRECTLY BEHIND THE family.

" 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life . . . ' "

Lord help us all, thought Doc Skates. Poor Carrie, sitting there full of guilt, thinks her tranquilizers did him in. Sure had a load of 'em in his stomach. But she just put the poor boob to sleep.

And Huber, back there, thinks he finished the job. Should have been more careful about his car tracks, but by the time the ambulance guys finished, no one was to know. Except me.

Can't say I can fault him for what he tried to do. I'll never forget what a mess that abortionist made of his kid's insides. And I saw others who had fallen for Steiner's money and his damned car.

Tough buzzard, though. Cut all to hell in that valley and still alive when I got there. Probably could have pulled his through, although he was close to the edge. I thought I had messed it up when I had to go back for my bag . . . One extra little cut with a scalpel was all it took . . . Well, doctors hold lives in their hands every day. Maybe I can be excused for dropping one . . .

" ' . . . and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. ' "



No one in the organization could do the job. It required an outsider — someone who would not be bothered by the bizarre method of execution!

The Method

by JACKIE RITCHIE

IT WAS AGREED THAT WE HAD TO GET RID OF VITO ROZSA and the assignment was given to me because I knew where I could get the man to do the job.

Julius Antonucci sighed as he gazed at the others gathered at the long table. "I just don't understand Vito. He seems to have no respect for anybody else's territory. His piece of the city is every bit as good as any one of ours, but he not only admits raiding, he seems to glory in it and dares us to do anything about it."

I concurred. "If we don't police ourselves, who will? We have to get rid of Vito once and for all. We should never have recruited him in the first place. We'll have to be more careful in the future."

However exterminating Vito might present something of a problem. I could not do the work myself. Neither could anyone in the organization. In this case, the matter would have to be handled by an outsider and I thought that I had the man.

Joseph Mathias. He was something of a giant, perhaps six foot-five and dull-witted. He had managed to get his picture in the newspapers a number of times, usually in connection with murder investigations, but he had never yet been jailed.

After our meeting adjourned, I went back home and changed to a sports jacket and slacks. I also put on a bow tie.

IT WAS NEARLY MIDNIGHT WHEN I ARRIVED AT MATHIAS' apartment. I pressed the buzzer at his door and waited.

When Mathias answered, he was in pajamas. Evidently he had been sleeping. His eyes were hostile. "What the hell is it?"

I smiled slightly. "I have a job for you. One which will pay you well. Very well."

His eyes narrowed. "What kind of a job?"

"A few minutes of work. Just the sort of thing at which you excell."

He let me into the room. "I'm listening."

I told him what I wanted done, though not yet why or how.

He appeared interested, but still wary. "Why come to me?"

"Let us not play," I said. "I know you will do the job. It pays ten thousand dollars. Five now and five after you have completed the assignment."

He studied me. "Just who are you?"

"It isn't at all necessary that you know."

"Is this a syndicate job?"

"We prefer to think of ourselves as an extended family." I removed an envelope from my pocket and handed it to him.

He counted the fifty one hundred dollar bills enclosed. "All right. Any particular time? Maybe you want to line up an alibi or something?"

"We think that noon tomorrow would be most appropriate." I gave him Vito's address. "You will find him in his apartment. He will be drugged and in a coma."

"Drugged?"

I lied again. "Yes." And then I told the truth. "He will be unconscious and offer no resistance."

"Who's going to drug him?"

"That does not concern you, but it will be done."

"If he's going to be unconscious, why can't you do the job yourself? Why shell out ten thousand bucks to hire me?"

"Let us say that for sentimental reasons, none of us can bring ourselves to commit the act. After all, he is a member of the organization."

And then I told him how Vito was to be terminated.

He blinked. "You're kidding."

"Not at all. I, of course, was against anything so barbaric. However one does not argue with the man who sits at the head of the table once he has made his decision."

Mathias stared at me and possibly a vagrant suspicion crossed his mind. If it did, my attire, especially the bow tie, probably dispelled it.

He shrugged. "If that's the way you want it done, that's the way I'll do it. But it's crazy."

THE NEXT EVENING AT TEN, I WENT TO VITO'S APARTMENT on the nineteenth floor of the Tannhauser building. I pressed the buzzer at his door. There was no answer.

I used the set of keys with which I had provided myself and finally found one which allowed me to enter. I went to Vito's bedroom.

Yes, Mathias had done his job well. Probably just one blow. I doubted very much that Mathias could have brought himself to strike another.

I could picture what had happened. There had been a shriek, of course. Certainly Vito would not have gone easily. I shuddered.

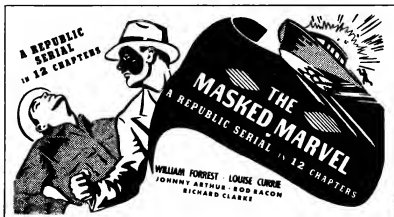
And where would I find Mathias now? In his apartment waiting for the second five thousand dollars? I rather doubted that.

No. When he realized what he had actually done, I think that he must have been filled with horror. He had probably decided to put as much distance between himself and the organization as he could and gone into hiding.

I gathered what was left of Vito in the bedsheet and dumped it down the hall incinerator chute — along with the wooden stake, the mallet, and the tobacco pouch containing four ounces of Vito's native soil.

In the old days, an entire coffin and pounds of earth would have been considered necessary. However we have discovered that a few ounces tucked under one's pillow is quite sufficient to see one safely through the day.

I went to the end of the hall, opened a window, and flew the direct route home.



Ronnie wasn't a bad kid. He was just desperate, so he'd have to rob his own mother!

THE IMPORTANT THING IN LIFE

by PATTY MATTHEWS

"IT'S \$10.00, RONNIE, AND YOU'D BETTER PAY UP, IF YOU know what's good for you!"

Ziggy's heavy, mean-eyed face was twisted into a sinister frown, and Ronnie knew that the bigger boy meant what he said.

Ronnie swallowed past the sudden lump in his throat, and tried to ignore the meaty fist pulling the material of his shirt.

"Sure," he said. "Sure, Ziggy. I told you I'll have the money. I will, I promise, this evening, just like I told you."

Ziggy pushed the smaller youth away, at the same time releasing his hold on his shirt. Ronnie swayed and stumbled, trying to keep his balance.

"You'd better have it, kid, or it will be the last time you welch on a bet!"

Ronnie watched Ziggy's broad back receding down the alley. He felt weak and sick to his stomach. He kept thinking of Dick Thomas; of what had happened to him when he couldn't pay up. The thought nauseated him.

He jammed his hands into his pockets, and headed for home. There was only one thing to do. He would have to hit his old lady's purse again, although he hated to do it.

It wasn't that he had any compunction against stealing from his

mother, but it had only been a week since the last time, and he was afraid that she would get suspicious. The old bag would have probably caught on long ago, except that she was so busy with that stupid club of hers, that she never knew what was going down around the house.

He glanced at his watch, 2:15pm; he had better hurry. She was due to go to some crazy protest or something at 3:00pm. He had heard her talking to some other old broad on the phone.

He quickened his stride, and began experiencing a surge of elation. It was going to be all right. Ronnie, the super-stud, was going to score again. It was going to be all right.

CAROLYN BONNER LOOKED AT HERSELF IN THE SLIGHTLY dusty vanity mirror, and decided that for a forty-four year old woman—well, forty six— she didn't look too bad. It was a shame that she had waited so long to find herself, to know herself. She could just cry, when she thought of the years she had wasted; years that she could never get back.

She brushed her hair down and over her shoulders. Her husband, Martin, had intimated that she was too old to wear her hair down.

"Chauvinist" She spat out the word, and smiled at the pleasure it gave her. Who was he, anyway? Who was any man to decide at what age she, or any woman, should wear their hair up or down? After all, the important thing in life was to be your own person, make your own decisions, do your own thing.

Bra-less, she turned to examine her figure in the mirror, sucking in her stomach and pulling her shoulders back; attempting to ignore the nagging thought that in her normal stance her abdomen would bulge and her breasts sag.

As she reached for her eyebrow pencil, she saw her husband reflected in the mirror. God! what a dull man. She couldn't think why she had stayed with him all these years.

He hesitated in the doorway, then moved toward her. "Carolyn?"

She gave a delicate shudder of distaste. Even his voice was apologetic. "What is it?" she asked crossly.

"Are you going out again?" Catching her eye in the glass, he hurried on. "I mean, you've been out almost every night this week. I thought you might be staying home tonight; maybe fix dinner for me and the boy?"

Carolyn gave an exasperated sigh, put down the eyebrow pencil, and turned toward him. "Martin, I told you about tonight. It's *very* important that we all be there. We need a show of strength. Tonight is really going to mean something, Martin."

She turned back to the mirror. "I bought some frozen dinners. They're in the fridge."

She had mentally dismissed him, but he still stood nervously behind her, twisting his hands. She tried to ignore him. She thought about tonight, and what was going to happen. Excitement welled in her. This would really show them. After tonight, her group would no longer be considered just a bunch of "silly women."

And they had done it alone. No man had helped them. Lilly Morgan had been in the army, and Denise Harper worked in an electrical shop. Together they had put together the bomb, in Denise's garage. And she, Carolyn Bonner, because she was president of the group, she had been chosen to carry it. It was a great honor, but she felt that she deserved it.

Right now the bomb was hidden on the top shelf of her closet. Carolyn smiled at her reflection. There was a lot of power in that bomb. A lot of power.

She looked up, and saw that Martin was still standing there. Anger replaced her feeling of exaltation. "Martin, I've told you, I'm in a hurry. If you have something else to say, well say it, and let me get dressed."

He gestured tentatively. "It's Ronnie. I think he's in trouble again."

She angrily waved the remark away. "What do you mean, again? You act like he's always in trouble."

"Well, isn't he?"

She snorted, and dusted her face with powder, speaking through the pink haze. "It's nothing but ordinary youthful high spirits. Every boy gets into a little trouble now and then. Why the way it is today, if Tom Sawyer was alive, they'd have the poor kid in a detention home."

Martin looked apologetic, but his tone was firm. "It's more than that, Carolyn. Why won't you face it. Today it was the principal of his high school. Ronnie was caught stealing from the gym lockers. He's going to be expelled."

Carolyn swung angrily around on the vanity bench. I'll have a talk with the principal tomorrow. I'm sure there's some mistake, but don't bother me with it right now. I've got more important things on my mind."

She turned back to the mirror, relieved to see that Martin was leaving the room. If she hurried, she would have time to grab a bite to eat before the others arrived.

In the kitchen, she poured herself a glass of beer, and picked up a slice of cold, limp pizza. As she stood by the refrigerator, she heard the front door slam.

"Ronnie, is that you? she called down the hallway.

"Yeah"

"I left frozen dinners in the fridge."

"I gotta go back out for a minute. I just have to pick up something from my room."

"Well, don't be late."

"Sure, Ma."

THE RITUAL OVER, HER DUTY PERFORMED, CAROLYN TURNED back to the pizza. Ronnie wasn't a bad kid really. She didn't know why Martin kept on so about him. There wasn't really anything wrong with the kid that he wouldn't grow out of.

Her mind jumped from Ronnie to the coming evening. It was really going to be something. The fuzz wouldn't suspect a thing, until it was all over; until their cherished new police station had a large hole where the ladies room used to be. They had rehearsed it several times. She, Carolyn, was to ask to use the John, while they were waiting to see the Chief. She would conceal the bomb in the trash container. They would be long gone before it went off. She smiled at the thought of how clever Denise had been. The bomb was set to go off at a specific time, but if it was opened, or tampered with, it would explode immediately.

She looked at her watch. The others would be there to pick her up any minute now; she had better get her things together. She threw the crust of the pizza into the garbage disposal, wiped off her hands, and hurried to her bedroom.

When Carolyn opened the door to her room, she saw Ronnie standing in the open doorway of her closet. Her purse was in his hands, and evidently she had surprised him in the act of opening it. Surprise, guilt and defiance showed on his face. Feeling as if she was existing in a quick-sand dream, she tried to open her mouth to shout.

There were two thoughts in her mind as the explosion ripped the room: She had been wrong about Ronnie, and perhaps it had not been so clever an idea after all, hiding the bomb in a woman's purse. ●

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"MSMM sure rings a bell with me!"

— Quasimodo, hunchback, Notre Dame

*He tried to explain to them who he really was — but they
wouldn't listen!*

TERRORIST

by EDWARD D. HOCH

HE LIKED THE COUNTRY, ALWAYS HAD.

He liked the colleges especially, with their ivied walls and peaceful classrooms, where he could enunciate the guttural syllables of his mother tongue without dishonor. It was a good country, and he wanted only to see more of it.

He'd married a woman, married too young, perhaps. Married foolishly. She always wanted a better house, or more money, or some other demand he could not meet. He wanted only the peace of his classroom, and his students. Perhaps some day she'd drive him back across the sea, to that other land he'd all but forgotten though still it was home.

Once he'd decided to leave her, decided while he stood in the morning hallway of their walk-up apartment and watched the rising sun trace little patterns of brightness on the faded carpet. He remembered the breeze in the air that day, remembered how it tinkled the hanging glass chimes over the porch steps. He'd walked all the way to the campus that morning, nodding unseeingly at the neighbors who passed, breathing in the air and squinting at the sun and thinking about leaving the wife he no longer loved.

Between classes they often let him fool about in the chemistry lab, where he daydreamed of inventing an explosive so powerful it would rid the world of war. Surely Joseph Pulitzer would have understood that. And Nobel, who invented dynamite while still trying to tell the world it could live at peace. When he talked of such things to his wife, she merely laughed. Had the atomic bomb ended war? Not forever, surely.

And he thought about his wife, eyes scanning the stoppered bottles on the lab shelf.

THEN THE DEMONSTRATIONS CAME, SHATTERED THE PEACE of his quiet classroom, made him think of the old country once again. Police on the campus, swinging their clubs, lobbing their tear gas grenades. He was with his students whom he loved.

After that, some called him names. Same names he'd been called all his life. Some said, said in anger, send him back where he came from!

Where he came from.

And a letter came finally from the State Department, because he was not a citizen.

It was raining the day the letter arrived, a fierce August rain that made him think of boyhood summers far away.

His wife said she would see about it.

And winter came, and the protests on campus increased. And now there were some acts of terrorism around the country. A bomb, a fire, a kidnapping.

He bought a pistol.

And he began spending more time in the chemistry lab at the university.

In Washington there was another bombing, this time at a public building.

ONE EVENING HIS WIFE ANNOUNCED THAT SHE'D OBTAINED an appointment to speak to someone about his status in this country. He told her he was pleased, and helped her pack a bag for the over-

night journey.

When she was gone and he was alone in the house, he got out the bomb he'd made from the chemicals.

That night he boarded the late train for Washington.

The city was grim in a February frost. People hurried about, breathing steam, waiting for the President's next budget message. No one paid him a heed, because he looked so harmless after all.

Senate Office Building.

No guards, no searches.

When will they learn?

He found the door he sought and checked his watch. Yes. Yes, now. He opened the door and saw the secretary half turn in his direction, saw the woman visitor waiting to be admitted, saw the closed door to the Senator's inner office.

Then he threw the bomb and slammed the door shut.

Running.

People running.

The blast and smoke. Confusion. Someone tugging at his arm until he brushed them aside.

Then free, into the street. Perfect.

The river was smooth that day, flowing smoothly, barely a ripple, reminding him of the rivers back home. He walked for a long time.

Terrorist.

Terrorist bomb kills two in Senator's office.

Secretary and woman constituent killed by blast.

Terrorist hunted.

Terrorist.

He took the evening train home.

IN THE MORNING THEY CAME TO HIS HOUSE. THEY WERE very polite, but they asked so many questions. They asked him about the chemistry lab at the university, and about where he'd been the previous day. They asked him about his wife.

His wife was not home, he told them.

She'd gone to Washington to plead his case before their Senator. She'd been killed by a terrorist's bomb.

How did you know that, they asked him.

The papers. It was in the papers. And on the television.

Not her name, they told him. Pending notification of next of kin.

And he was next of kin.

It was a terrorist, he kept insisting.

But they arrested him and took him away.

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